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THE CONGREGATIONALISM OF NEW ENGLAND
AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS
IN ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND
1641 - 1662

by
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PREFACE

The intention of this thesis is an examination of the conflict and interaction between the Presbyterian and Congregational church polities, as seen in the polemic and apologetic material published concerning the "New England way" between 1641 and 1662. No attempt is made to describe the historical influence of one polity on the development of the other, except by the way; the aim is rather to present a systematic view of the arguments actually used by each side in attack and defence. In the works under survey, the attack was largely made by the Presbyterian divines, the defence by the New Englanders; as a result, the emphasis is on the Congregational system under Presbyterian criticism, rather than vice versa.

The New England writers, alone among contemporary Independents, spoke from the experience of an established Congregationalism; this, the Presbyterians could not afford to ignore. It is this which makes a study of the controversy between them especially interesting. Scottish and English Presbyterians had not only to prove that the New England way was theoretically wrong, but also that practically it was a failure. This gave added urgency to the debate.

These works reveal not only the differences between the two sides, but many of their common presuppositions as well; and a knowledge of each of these things is important for those who have

followed in their steps. For the spiritual descendents of these men often use arguments in defending the polities they have inherited, which have little or no relation to the principles used by their forefathers in establishing them. We can only benefit from a greater understanding of some of the forgotten principles which lie behind our systems and their differences. Absolute scriptural literalism, double predestination, covenant theology, millennialism, and the idea of the Roman Catholic Church as "Great Myserie Babylon," are more or less foreign to the thought of most modern churchmen; and Ramism, repugnance for democracy, the philosophy of Social Contract, and "the duties of the Magistrate in the first table of the Law," are, for almost all, as relics of an age long dead. Yet this is the native soil of New England Congregationalism, and of Westminster Presbyterianism as well. One may hope that an increased understanding of some of the reasons behind their quarrel may be some help to us in making it up.

In matters of style and organisation, I have been guided by Kate L. Turabian's A Manual for Writers (Chicago, 1955) and Horace Hart's Rules for Compositors and Readers (36th ed. rev.; London, 1957); the American style of punctuation has been followed throughout. I have chosen to spell Robert Baylie's name in one of its seventeenth-century forms (the one most often used by New Englanders in referring to him); most of the other names involved did not deviate so widely (if at all) from their modern forms.

It remains to express my gratitude to those who have aided

me in the research and writing of this thesis: to the librarians and staff of the Reading Room of the British Museum, the National Library of Scotland, the Edinburgh University Library, and especially to the Rev. Dr J. A. Lamb and his staff at the New College Library, who have all been most courteous and helpful; to the Messrs Roland Foster, Leonard T. Grant, William W. Hayes, James R. Memmott, and Stephen A. Woodruff, who have all been kind enough to share results of their researches which they felt would prove helpful; to Miss Joan Ross and Mrs Claire Bruce Watt, who patiently and diligently typed the final copy from a very involved manuscript; to Miss E. R. Leslie, Assistant Secretary to the Post-Graduate School of Theology of Edinburgh University, who smoothed over many a rough place; and to the Rev. R. A. S. Barbour, Secretary to the School, whose advice has always been freely given and gratefully received. I owe special thanks to the Very Rev. Principal Emeritus Hugh Watt, who in two minutes suggested a title which has stood the test of three years' research, and who has ever been willing to help and advise; to Professor Maynard Mack, of Yale University, a chance conversation with whom led to the thesis taking its present outline; and to the Rev. Professor T. F. Torrance, who graciously gave of his time to illuminate my understanding of present research into primitive polity. To my advisers, my special gratitude: to the Rev. Principal Charles Duthie, of the Scottish Congregational College, for suggesting this field and for his keen and helpful interest in my progress; and to the Very Rev. Principal J. H. S. Burleigh of New College, for his attention to details and for his

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Finally, two debts of gratitude which words cannot adequately repay: to my father, George I. Chatfield, who first encouraged me to enter on this course, and without whose support nothing would have been possible; and to my wife, Martha Jane, who was confident of the end when I was doubtful of the beginning, and who has given devotedly of her time, talent, and encouragement, that, as much as it lay within her power, the event should not fall short of her expectation.

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INTRODUCTION

So these that want meanes of salvation at home, are desirous to seek after them, and where they finde them, there they goe; and part with any thing to enjoy the purity of Gods worship and ordinances: these in Gods account are the worthiest Christians.

--Cotton, Canticles, p. 33

In 1620 the little group of one hundred English Pilgrims from Holland landed on the bleak New England shore; when the first winter was past, only fifty remained. For eight years they were alone. Yet by 1640, some twenty thousand souls had disembarked at Massachusetts Bay, and thirty-five towns had been settled (most of them quickly exchanging English or even Scottish for the Indian place names: Oxford for Sagoquas; Boston for Accominticus; Edenborow for Kenebecka; and Aberden for Pennobscot). Economic motives (plagues, depressions, monopolies, and ship-money) had driven some; but most (including tradesmen, country gentlemen, and squires) came for religious reasons. For many Ministers and their parishioners, it was a providential opportunity to escape the Laudian innovations without having to become Separatists; to avoid Star Chamber and High Commission and find security for their families to worship God in his pure ordinances; and to flee the divine wrath, which was even then consuming half-Reformed European Protestant nations, and which might at any moment be poured out upon hapless England. This drain of England's best men might have continued longer, but the Long Parliament was

called, and Laud went to the Tower; then came the Civil War, the Assembly at Westminster, and the Solemn League and Covenant, and men's hearts and hopes were invested once more in their homeland.

In New England, men took stock of what they had, and began to build. With seed, rope, tools, nets, livestock and utensils; with farmers, fishermen, sailors, shipwrights, cloth-makers and men of commerce, they began to fashion a commonwealth. Intellectually, they had with them some of the finest minds of the age, of a certain school. They were scholastics and yet humanists; subservient to the will of God and yet confident of the will and mind of man; subject to God's inscrutable providence, and yet binding him in his own covenant; quarrying the Bible for its indispensable revelation, and yet trusting in the "reliques of reason" left them after the Fall, certain that what they knew by the "light of nature" was a part of God's truth, and confident, as Perry Miller says, that "the mind is fundamentally commensurate with creation." Their Congregational polity, for which they had abandoned home and country, was not a result of chance: in setting it up, they were actualising principles learned (from Parker, Baynes, and even Cartwright) in the conflict with the Prelates; they were carrying some Reformation doctrines out to their logical conclusion; and they owed much to that "father of New England Congregationalism," William Ames (himself in the debt of one whom he called "that greatest master of arts, Peter Ramus"). And beneath everything lay a deep-rooted horror of Separatism, and a quiet but powerful Millennialism.

They established a Christian commonwealth, with Church and

magistrate in the closest harmony; the towns were modelled on the English manor system, and in every town was a meeting-house, and a little covenant congregation, usually with two Ministers (a Pastor and a Teacher). All citizens were compelled to attend worship (though not to join a congregation); even so, extra "lectures" grew so popular that the General Court tried to curtail them. "Sectaries" and "unruly spirits" were not tolerated; Prayer-book and Presbytery were prevented. They had not gone to seek 'freedom,' but orthodoxy: they fled one Establishment to erect another; they escaped the English parish system to draw the boundaries of their own; they left Erastians to lean heavily on magistrates of their own choosing (who were at times just as arbitrary as those they had left behind). And they were content.

Few settlers left the young colony (beyond those trouble-makers who were driven out), except for those influential Ministers and laymen who returned to England as representatives of the New England way. They went, not only to defend their colony from attacks, but also to recommend their system to a nation labouring to establish its own; and both of these tasks show what influence New England had upon Old. New Englanders hoped and prayed that the Reformation afoot in England would follow their own "primitive" congregational way; and indeed, the relatively few but enormously influential Westminster Independents looked on the New England way as an "amiable pattern," although they refused to be bound by it, and, as time went on, became more and more critical of it (especially for its widely-reported persecutions). And from the Presbyterian party (who approved of their lack of toleration) they

had to defend themselves against charges of Brownism, Separatism, and Morellianism.

Thus it was the desire to be a model to Old England, to recommend themselves to their English Independent friends, and to clear themselves of unjust charges, which called forth the fifty or more books and tracts from New England which were published in London on the subject of church polity, from 1641 to 1662.¹ A few were written by New Englanders who were in England, but most were sent over by ship. Some were intended for publication, and were seen through the press by some of the English Independents; others were letters or manuscripts written merely for private information, but published by the same men. Interest in the New England way was intense, and Presbyterians were not slow in producing whole books, and parts of books, objecting to the tenets contained in these tracts from the wilderness. But the New Englanders were at a disadvantage in carrying on a polemic warfare. They were three thousand miles from the scene of the battle; books attacking them were often not sent over promptly; they had much work to do in their own sphere; it was difficult for them to consult together;² and those to whom their manuscripts were

¹See Appendix E for a chronological list of the chief works published on both sides of the controversy. Publication in London was both desirable, since most of these works were for the English public; and necessary, since Stephen Day's printing press, set up in Cambridge, New England, in 1639, was apparently not capable of much work: by 1662, we have record of no more than ten works printed on it, none of which exceeds seventy pages.

²Presbyterians often complained about their lack of agreement, and it was not until 1653 that the Cambridge Platform of 1648 (the first fully agreed common standard from New England) was published in London.

entrusted often held them back until what they felt was an opportune time.

In spite of all these difficulties, this little body of literature from New England had a large influence. The way they treated the returning New Englanders reflects the eagerness with which many of the English looked for news from those shores:

And when sometimes a New-England man returnes thither, how is he lookt upon, lookt after, received, entertained, the ground he walkes upon beloved for his sake, and the house held the better where he is? how are his words lissened to, laid up, and related frequently when he is gone? neither is any love or kindnesse held too much for such a man.¹

For they were on the high road down which Old England was still apprehensively gazing: the road of the reformation of God's Church. Every report from such travellers was eagerly scanned, with an eye to either imitation or criticism.

For the men who engaged in this conflict, did so because they loved Christ's Church more than life and fortune and reputation. And what Perry Miller has said of those who wrote from America, is true of their English opposites as well:

The church incarnated upon earth the entire pattern of the New England idea; it was the emotional center and the intellectual synthesis for this particular school of Puritans.²

¹William Hooke, New Englands Teares, for Old Englands Feares (1641), p. 21.

²Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (New York, 1939), p. 435.

I. THE BIBLE

We are not to think that Christ, who was the Lawgiver of the Old Testament, was not also the Lawgiver of the New, and hath left us sufficient direction therein for the government of his people both for faith and manners. Now in the Old Testament all must be done according to the Patterne shewed to Moses in the Mount, even to the least pin in the Tabernacle. . . . So in the New Testament is layd downe a perfect platforme . . .

--Christ on His Throne, p. 12f

Principles of Interpretation

It became commonly held at this period, that any system of Church polity must exhibit its "Divine Right," its heavenly license, its scriptural authorisation, before any man could dare yield his conscience to it. And so strongly did the Word of God bind men and carry them away, that many of the prominent figures, especially among the Independents, had been driven to forsake all (or at least hazard a great deal), once convinced by "cleare light from the Word" that their former Church-way was not from God, but from men.

It is therefore important for a study such as this to discover what basic assumptions (either acknowledged or hidden) underlay the use of Scripture at this time. For even some Episcopalians, many of whom had formerly been satisfied with prudence and patristics, had been stung by the Puritans' Biblical devotion into casting about for texts to prove that their system

alone was juris divini or of divine right, that is, having "expresse warrant from the word."

In their search for a Church polity, responsible Puritans lighted their way into the murky library of Scripture with certain clear and shining principles. We shall examine only those having direct bearing on this area of church polity. The important exegetical assumptions were of two kinds, theological and hermeneutical.

Theological Principles

Inspiration and the Rule.--First of all, it went almost without saying that the Word of God was written by men "carried by the Holy Ghost, farre above humane infirmity and possibility of erring."¹ The inerrancy of the Bible was assumed by scientists as well as theologians, Episcopalians as well as Independents. To question it was the rankest kind of heresy. As an article of faith, a theological and exegetical principle, it outlasted a great many of its contemporary beliefs, and has held a revered place in a large section of Christian opinion down to the present day.

In fact, the faith of Protestants depended on the authority of the Bible as "the Rule," that is, the pattern, the regulating principle of all that they did, especially in the embattled arena of Church polity. "That principle from which Faith doth first begin," said William Ames, "and into which it is last

¹John Cotton, A Modest and Cleare Answer to Mr. Balls Discourse of set formes of Prayer (1642), p. 30.

resolved, is, that the Scripture is revealed from God for our salvation, as a sufficient rule of Faith and manners."¹ And all of human life was subsumed under one of these two heads, Faith or Manners, the first or second table of the Law (including, of course, the manner of ordering the Church of Christ).

The Pattern from the Mount.--To the English Presbyterians or the New-English Independents, labouring to erect the fabric of their Church-government, this belief in the Scripture as the Rule or Pattern for life, was applied nowhere with more strictness than in the area of polity. Here the pamphleteers cried for "warrant from the word" until they were hoarse; and here they shared a peculiar assumption, theologically derived from the one just mentioned, which was of far-reaching importance. We might call it the expectation of a "Pattern from the Mount." They believed that since God had been quite specific to Moses on Sinai, in dictating the exact forms of Tabernacle and Cult for Israel, much more (since these things only "shadowed forth Christ") had Christ and his Spirit, in the New Testament, given exact blueprints for Church and Worship.² They agreed with the

¹William Ames, The Marrow of Sacred Divinity (1639), II.v.30; cf. Samuel Rutherford, The Due Right of Presbyteries (1644), I.p.42f; Walter J. Ong, Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 123.

²This went as far as laying down what God should have included in his Word: "the Government of the Church of Christ . . . is of very great concernment; and therefore to be laid down in Scripture: at least by such evidence, as with moderate opening to godly, knowing, and impartial men, may comfortably be perceived"; John Ellis, Jun., Vindiciae Catholicae (1647), p. 20. This is assurance amounting almost to presumption.

continental Reformed Churches "that there is in the Word of God, an exact forme of Governement set downe."¹

A corollary assumption was the belief that "this forme of Government Christ established in his Church."² If Christ, by his own inerrant Word (the infallible Rule of faith and life) had given men an exact pattern of the Church, its life and work "even to the least pin in the Tabernacle,"³ then faithful Christians must find this pattern, and establish it without further delay; failure to do so could be (and was) construed as wilful disobedience to Christ. Many Presbyterians and Independents held, especially while still fighting the common enemy (a church polity of human devising) that the proper polity was "altogether essentiall to the very being of a Church;"⁴ without it, a Church, no matter how well endowed otherwise, was no true Church at all.

Subsumed under the basic belief (that there existed in the New Testament a "Pattern" for Church Government and Worship) were three constituent beliefs: (1) that Jesus Christ gave specific instructions in this matter himself; (2) that the Apostles passed on further instructions, and instituted practices, both alike inspired and inerrant; and (3) that the Apostolic Church

¹Smectymnuus, An Answer to a Book entitled, an Humble Remonstrance (1641), p. 71.

²Idem.

³Christ on His Throne (1640), p. 13.

⁴Joseph Hall, A Defence of the Humble Remonstrance (1641), p. 129.

was absolutely pure in doctrine and practice, and this doctrine and practice was in all primitive Churches precisely the same, and supremely imitable. With these assumptions firmly believed by all sides, later Episcopalians¹ as well as Puritans, all that was necessary was to set down the commands of Jesus, the instructions and institutions of the Apostles, and the practice of the Apostolic Church, and there would be the complete Church platform, the pattern from the Mount, the blueprint for ecclesiastical purity.

First, it was a basic assumption that Christ himself had left instructions for his Church: "wee are not to think that Christ, who was the Law-giver of the Old Testament, was not also the Law-giver of the New."² His commandments on matters ecclesiastical were found mainly in Matthew 16:18f, 18:15ff, 28:19f, and John 20:21ff.

But it was obvious that in the words of Jesus alone, there was not enough material to establish a full-blown system of Church Government. Had Christ left his Church (his own Bride) without a sufficient rule for her conduct? Not at all. His Spirit had guided the Apostles to fill up what was wanting, so

¹"The best Charter pleaded for Episcopacy in former times was ecclesiasticall constitution, and the favour of Princes. But our latter Bishops suspecting this would prove too weake and sandie a foundation to support a building of that transcending loftinesse, that they have studied to advance the Babell of Episcopacy unto, have indeavoured to under-pinne it with some texts of Scripture, that they might plead a Jus Divinum for it"; Smectymnus, A vindication of the Answer to the Humble Remonstrance (1641), p. 113f.

²Christ on His Throne, p. 12; cf. Ellis, Vindiciae, p. 19.

that Thomas Goodwin could confidently say, "There are in the Books of the New Testament written by the Apostles, manifold particular directions and notes, purposely and professedly written to direct the Government of Churches, and ordering the Worship of them."¹ Here, in the commandments and institutions of the Apostles, was far more material for the rebuilding of the primitive Church. Texts abounded.² The Apostolic commands to separate from the heretics or scandalous, that members share their substance with their teachers, and seek ecclesiastical governors who had the proper qualifications; these were all alike inspired and inerrant, a part of Christ's own rule for his Church.

But even this was not enough. Episcopalians, of course, had always led in seeking precedent from primitive practice; and Puritans as well, to complete their systems, were forced to draw water from the same well (although they tried to use a smaller bucket). Paul Baynes, who exerted such a great influence on the Puritan (and especially Independent) mind, observed in his widely-read and often-quoted Diocesans Tryall, "What a grosse thing it is to imagine, that the first frame the Apostles did erect was not for posteritie to imitate?"³ The Protestant

¹Thomas Goodwin, Works (1696 ed.), IV, 13; cf. Ellis, loc. cit.; but see John Norton, Responsio ad Totam Quaestionum (1648), p. 59.

²e.g.: Rom.16:17; I Cor.5; 11:23ff; II Cor.2:6ff; Gal.6:6; I Thess.5:12f; II Thess.3:14f; I Tim.3:1-13, 5:17; II Tim.4:1f; Tit.1:5-9, 3:10; I Pet.5:1-5.

³Paul Baynes [or Bayne], The Diocesans Tryall (n.p., 1621), p. 23; cf. Ellis, loc. cit.

mind has never ceased thrilling to this note.

The importance of the category of "primitive Church" for this study is underscored by the fact that a majority of the polity tenets on both sides were upheld by appeals to the practice of the primitive Church. That Church was assumed to have been inerrant and unified, although its duration was debated.

How long did the primitive Church, the living blueprint, continue? Dr. George Downname, later Bishop of Derry, believed that proofs from the primitive Church were acceptable up to the fifth century (the inception of papal usurpation), since one must include some time during which the Church had been under a Christian magistrate.¹ But the anonymous "parish disciplinarian"² with whom Downname was contending (for the lawfulness of Diocesan Bishops) not only maintained that corruption set in after the first two hundred years (with the introduction of "Presidents of Presbyteries"), but that the authoritative primitive Church existed only during the Apostles' lifetimes.³ Eventually, many Episcopalians joined ranks with Puritan thinkers in this matter,

¹George Downname [or Downham], A Defence of the Sermon (1611), p. 21.

²i.e., Congregationalist.

³An Ansvere to a sermon (1609), p. 78 (paging faulty). He pointed out that much of what Downname alleged from tradition concerning the functions of Bishops was invalid as authoritative proof because it had "no ground from any testimony within the first 200 yeares, much lesse within the Apostles times, after which, there was no divine institution, of any newe calling in the Church."

This caused one serious problem: if the primitive Church ended with the Apostles, it was therefore a Church which had not enjoyed the services of a Christian magistrate. The Puritans all labored under this weighty handicap of turning for their perfect pattern of polity to a Church which had lacked what they believed to be an essential part of the system.

and appealed to the same authority: the primitive Church, which ended with the Apostles, and whose authoritative practices were to be inferred only from Scripture, and not from the uninspired and fallible writings of later men and councils.

The second commonly-held belief concerning the primitive Church (and the most important for this topic) concerned its unity. Presbyterians and Independents concurred with Downname when he asserted boldly, "it is not to be doubted but that the primitive Churches indued with the power of Ecclesiastical gouernment were of the like nature and constitution,"¹ and for once his opponent echoed him: "it is cleare by all learned, that the constitutiō of the visible churches, vvas at the first one and the same, in all places."² The implications of this, for the hermeneutics of the Church politicians, were very broad. It meant, in effect, that if one could prove something to have been a practice of one New Testament Church at one time, it had therefore been the practice of all the New Testament Churches, from Jerusalem to Rome, during the period of their pristine, Apostolic purity. It was therefore possible to base important points of polity on the doubtful practice of one New Testament Church, as inferred from some obscure verse in an Apostolic Epistle. A corollary of this belief was the conviction that "the true visible church of Christ is but onely one (questionlesse) in nature, form

¹Downname, Defence, p. 42.

²An Ansvvere to a Sermon, p. 66.

and constitution."¹ Therefore the unity of the Apostolic Church was supposed to extend to all Churches in all times and places.² To deviate from primitive practice, or to refuse to establish it once it had been pointed out on Scripture-grounds, was tantamount to apostacy.

Third, it was believed that the Apostolic Churches were, like the Scripture, inerrant. They could not err, not because of some mystical purity inherent in them,³ but because of the presence with them of the Apostles, men inspired by the Holy Ghost. Thus, the belief in the inerrancy of those Churches was actually a corollary of the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Scripture. As John Cotton put it, "the estate of the Churches as then remained tanquam intemerata virgo, whilst the Apostles and the Apostolique men lived; men that could not erre themselves; and were more watchfull and zealous then to suffer any error to get head in any of the Churches."⁴

¹John Ball, A Friendly Triall (1640), p. 287. Compare the statement that all the Reformed Confessions "maintain a justifiableness of their present government, and a necessity of it as the only government appointed by GOD in his Church", Smectymnuus, Vindication, p. 180; cf. Samuel Hudson, A Vindication of the Essence and Unity of the Chvrch Catholike Visible (1650), p. 78.

²"It will be easily granted that some one Church-Government is much to be preferred before another, yea before all other", Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici (1646), p. 2.

³Although some such belief as this may well have been in the background of thought about the Church, in an era when humanists looked to a golden age, and Ramus posited a "pre-history of a 'pure' and 'uncorrupted' dialectic"; Ong, Ramus, p. 215.

⁴Cotton, A Modest and Cleare Answer, p. 45.

The Independents were at a great disadvantage in one respect: unlike the Presbyterians, they did not have (in the early part of the century) a full-grown exemplar. Various systems of Presbyterian Church government had been functioning fairly smoothly and peacefully for many years. But until the emergence of the New England Churches, there was no fully satisfactory pattern for Independents, in fact or in writing. They needed, therefore: an explanation for the previous historical invisibility of Independency¹ (and for the fact that the great Reformers had not unearthed this particular Pattern from the Mount during a century of quarrying for the true Scripture polity); a cover for the necessary process of changing their political principles as they tried them out in practice;² and an explanation for the constantly embarrassing fact that most of the Independent Divines had once tolerated or even practiced things which they now condemned as idolatrous and unlawful.

They found what they needed in the principle of "further light," or progressive interpretation. It is basically a theological principle, but as used by the Independents it was applied

¹George Downname had, in 1611, brought the charge that there was "not any one example being to be produced in the whole world, neither in, nor since the Apostles times, vntill our age, of any Church gouerned according to the new-found parish discipline." A Defence of the Sermon, II. p. 39.

²It is not to be imagined that the majority of the Independents were hypocritical in this. They were worried by the fact that their polity was previously nearly unknown; they were terribly sensitive to the charge of "novelty"; they did not like the political necessity of constantly altering their principles. They faced a Presbyterianism long in practice and fully delineated, with little more than an ideal which they burned to actualise, and an almost childishly sincere conviction that it was supremely true.

very effectively to the hermeneutics of Church polity. It is most fully stated in Edward Winslow's report of John Robinson's farewell speech to the Pilgrims:

he charged us before God and his blessed Angels, to follow him no further then he followed Christ. And if God should reveal any thing to us by any other instrument of his, to be as ready to receive it, as ever we were to receive any truth by his Ministry: For he was very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to breake forth out of his holy Word. He took occasion also miserably to bewaile the state and condition of the Reformed Churches, who were come to a period in Religion, and would go no further then the instruments of their Reformation A misery much to bee lamented: For though they were precious shining lights in their times, yet God had not revealed his whole will to them: And were they now living, saith hee, they would bee as ready and willing to embrace further light, as that they had received. For, saith he, It is not possible the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick Antichristian darknesse, and that full perfection of knowledge should breake forth at once.¹

This natural sense that the Churches, as they emerged from popery, would in ordinary course grow in purity and in understanding of the truth of the Scripture, was, as we see here, already mixed with a certain feeling of millenial expectation. This feeling that there was an interrelation between the progress of Reformation, the perfection of the Puritan (and especially the Independent) Church discipline, and the coming of the Kingdom of Christ, had been a strain in Puritan thought for some time.² It doubtless owed a great deal to the philosophy of Church history

¹Edward Winslow, Hypocrisie Vnmasked (1646), p. 97f.

²Downname had complained of the Puritan statement "that in the second petition of the Lords prayer, Let thy Kingdome come, wee are to pray, that your Discipline may be aduanced", Defence, I. p. 129. "Most Puritans believed that the establishment of God's kingdom upon earth might actually come about in their lifetimes." William Kellaway, The New England Company, 1649-1776 (London, 1961), p. 5.

promulgated by the enormously popular "Magdeburg Centuries."¹
This interpretation of Church history as the gradual exaltation of the Man of Sin (with the consequent depression of the true Churches and obscuring of the light of the Word), followed by the beginnings of his decline, was most clearly and systematically stated by Thomas Hooker of "Hartford upon Connecticott."²

¹Matthias Flacius' conception of his Ecclesiastica Historia (a polemic Protestant history of the Church up through the thirteenth century, popularly called the "Magdeburg Centuries") envisaged a work "in which it should be set forth, in certain order and sequence of time, how the true Church and its religion gradually fell away from its original Apostolic purity and simplicity, and this partly from the negligence and ignorance of its teachers, partly from the wickedness of the ungodly; in which it should also be shown how the Church was ever and anon restored by some genuinely pious men, and how the light of truth now shone more clearly, and was again more or less obscured by the increasing darkness of ungodliness" (apud Hastings' Encyclopedia, VI, 49; italics mine). Publication began in Basle in 1562, was completed in 1574; other editions were begun in 1564 and 1624.

The "Centuries" is cited in the margins of a great many seventeenth-century authors. It seems highly probable that it was in good measure responsible for the Independents' millenarianism, especially for their principle of "further light." It would have been popular with them in any event, for its description of the Primitive Church, in which particular churches "did ordain and depose Ministers, admonish and excommunicate obstinate offenders: held Synods or meetings, wherein they determined affairs of their own body: In doubtful cases they consulted with other Churches, not by reason of their superiority, but upon the ground of common Charity." (from Cent. 2, cap. de Regim. Eccl. Tit. de privat. Syn. de tit. Consoc. Eccles., apud Ellis, Vindiciae Catholicae, p. 10; cf. John Cotton, The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared (1648), I. p. 96f.)

²For a similar, but different view, see Norton, Responsio, sig. A4 recto - A7 verso; this, generally, was Thomas Goodwin's belief (see Rembert Byrd Carter, "The Presbyterian-Independent Controversy" unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Faculty of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, 1961, p. 77); it corresponds to Peter Ramus' view of the history of "the 'true' dialectic"; see Ong, Ramus, p. 47; Cotton, Way Cleared, I. p. 93: "There is no false way, but is an aberration from the first institution."

Immediately after Christ's ascension began the centuries of heresy, followed by the usurpation of his offices which culminated in Boniface III and Hildebrand (the Pope then made canons as chief Prophet, retained and remitted as chief Priest, and ruled the Churches of Christ as King). Then Hooker pointed out how the process had been reversed: Christ had returned as Prophet (i.e. in the increased respect for the sole authority of his Word) using such men as Peter Waldo, Wicklif, Hus, and Jerome of Prague; as Priest through Luther's exaltation of Christ's one sufficient sacrifice; and now he was in the process of returning as King over his Church. Henry VIII had, in the famous Puritan phrase, "cut off the head of Popery, but left the body of it." Then the Bishops had been cashiered, and the parity of the ministry restored. Now only one obstacle to Christ's visible reign remained: the lordly power of Presbyteries over the Churches. Only remove that, and Christ would at long last, for the first time since the Apostles' days, be enthroned as king over his heritage. These were the last times, and the thousand years of Christ's rule with his saints was about to begin.¹ The establishment of the pure government of Christ was in fact his kingdom come, his reign begun.²

¹ see Thomas Hooker, A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline (1648), sig. A2 recto - a3 recto, cf. sig. c1 recto, c2 verso; cf. Cotton, Way Cleared, I. p. 66f; John Allin and Thomas Shepard, A Defence of the Answer (1648), p. 26f.

² "Then Christ reigneth, when all things among men, are done by the direction of the word of his mouth:" John Eliot, The Christian Commonwealth (1654), preface.

This eschatology, so seldom emphasised, so constantly present, this expectant imminentism which ran so deep in the theological thought of the New England Elders especially, powerfully affected their hermeneutics:

seeing our faith resteth onely on the Word of the Lord, and his spirit breathing therein, and the Word hath promised more and more light shall break forth in these times, till Antichrist be utterly consumed and abolished; we shall sinne against the Grace and Word of truth if we confine our truth, either to the Divines of present or former ages.¹

How did the Reformation come about? they asked themselves. By the activity of God, removing the veil from men's faces, and pointing out first one truth and then another in his Word, and thus leading them step by step out of the darkness of Antichrist. He did not stop with Waldo, or Luther, or Calvin, or Henry VIII; why should they think he had stopped now, with Christ not yet enthroned? Since there was still another step to take, would not God reveal still more hitherto-unsuspected truth from his Word? The Independents believed he would.

As a result, they were free to abandon positions which became too absurd; dispense with ideals which were unworkable in practice; justify their former indiscretions;² excuse (if rather left-handedly) their opponents who as yet lacked fullness of light;³ and, by seeking "further light" from Scripture when

¹Cotton, Modest, p. 45 (the most compact statement of the whole position); cf. Church-Government and Church-Covenant discussed, In an Answer of the Elders (1643), II. p. 54.

²See Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 54.

³See Thomas Welde, An Answer to W.R. (1644), p. 11f.

confronted with any unforeseen developments, advance after Christ as he led his saints toward the millenium. Their desire "not to make our present judgement and practice a binding law unto ourselves for the future," they wished "were. . . enacted as the most sacred law of all other, in the midst of all other Laws and Canons Ecclesiastical in Christian States and Churches throughout the world."¹ They were untroubled by charges of inconsistency (in urging others to adopt what they seemed unsure of themselves); of "skeptick irresolution"; of being "Seekers" (which was nearly as reprehensible as being Separatists); and of advocating an "implicit Popish faith."² But although they were thought to waver with the wind, the Independents had in this principle a compass, which(though it appeared to swerve as their ship rode out the storms, yet) seemed certain to indicate unerringly the true course they must steer. As the Apologists put it, calmly and with just a touch of superiority, when speaking of the Reformed Churches, "it may without prejudice to them, or the imputation of Schisme in us from them, be thought, that they coming new out of Popery

¹Thomas Goodwin et al., An Apologeticall Narration (1643), p. 10f. It was this statement of the position which brought it fully to the outraged attention of the opposition. For an example of the application of this in New England, see Henry Martyn Dexter's indispensable The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years, as seen in its Literature (London, [1880]), p. 377f.

²See John Vicars, The Picture of Independency (1645), p. 6; Robert Baylis, A Dissvative from the Errours of the Time (1645), p. 101; William Prynne, A Fresh Discovery (1645), pp. 1, 46; and Samuel Rutherford, The Due Right of Presbyteries (1644), I. pp. 136f, 138.

(as well as England) and the founders of that reformation not having Apostolique infallibility, might not be fully perfect the first day."¹

Hermeneutical Principles.

Among the principles which had an important effect on the hermeneutics of Church polity, logic held the foremost place. As Perry Miller has pointed out, the Puritans (he was dealing especially with the New England Divines), believing that all their scholastic arts were ways of knowing given by God, held that the special revelation in Scripture, although it could not have been derived from merely human knowledge, was nevertheless conformable with all else that could be known. The knowledge and the knowing alike came from God; therefore, Scripture was to be understood in the same way as anything else of similar matter and form, and the knowledge gained from Scripture and Nature would not be contradictory, but complementary.²

Since Scripture was to be scanned by the same arts of grammar and rhetoric as any other communication, it was also to be understood and explained by the same rules of logic and method. There was a persistent conviction that although much of the Bible was written in allegory, and used various figures

¹Goodwin et al., Apologeticall Narration, p. 22. Smectymnus said exactly the same thing of the Lutheran Churches, that it could not be said that they "came out so perfectly in the first Edition, but that desideratur nonnulla;" Smectymnus, Vindication, p. 42.

²Perry Miller, The New England Mind (New York, 1939), p. 461, et passim.

of expression to make the truth comprehensible to "the ruder sort," yet underneath it was basically logical and methodical; "wherefore wee should not attribute a right Method to the teachablenesse of Scripture, there can bee no reason given."¹ The underlying logic of the Scripture was believed to be the same as that taught in the Universities. To learn the truth about God and redemption and the Church, these basically medieval rules of thought were diligently applied to texts of Scripture.² This meant, as Miller has pointed out, that a Puritan's polity owed a great deal to his logical school, whether Aristotelian or Ramist. It also meant that texts could be tortured by a logical, methodical club to confess interpretations they had never given out before.

Another result of this assumption of the basic unity of all knowledge, natural and revealed, was that ultimately the Independents were bringing extra-Scriptural proofs for their system. Said one author, of the appointing of a President over a Presbytery, "it is agreeable to order and by consequent to the will

¹[John Milton], Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defence (1641), p. 40. Puritans were at times a bit puzzled that when it came to his own truth, "God hath not pleased to deliver Systematically in a way of absolute precept or demonstrative clearnesse in every particular," Richard Vines, The authors, nature, and danger of haeresie (1647), p. 24. But this only made them the more sure that "logic alone could interpret the Bible" (Miller, op. cit., p. 113).

²It is interesting to note that sometimes these logical rules could be relaxed when dealing with Scripture, since it was sufficient and inerrant; the Smectymnuans, in their Vindication, did not blush to assert that even a negative argument (inferring non-existence from lack of reference) "frō Scripture may be valid, though from no other authority." It is a measure of the height to which Biblical authority had reached, that it was permitted to excuse bad logic.

and word of God."¹ They had discovered a way to slip out the back door of their theory, to bring in human examples (although they would not have acknowledged them to be such). That which was logical, or could be deduced from the Scripture by the rules of "right reason," was therefore very nearly as good as Scripture itself. This also meant that logical consequences from human examples could be used to support principles which had, perhaps, only meagre Scriptural warrant.²

Finally, we note that for William Ames, and most of his followers, "there is onely one sence of one place of Scripture."³ Thus in the controversy over the meaning of any particular text, if one interpreter had diligently applied the rules of logic and method, and thus arrived at "the cleere sense of the Word regularly analyzed,"⁴ the conclusion must be that any other interpretations were wrong. "how many expositions soever, any text of scripture, in the conceit of men, may admit; it is certayne the Holy Ghost, except by way of allegorie, intendeth no more then one, which is the onely true meaning of the place."⁵

¹An Ansvvere to a Sermon, II. p. 70 (italics mine).

²See, for example, the reasoning from the polity of a city to the polity of an Independent Church: Allin and Shepard, A Defence of the Answer, pp. 76, 79, 82.

³Ames, The Marrow of Sacred Divinity, I. xxxiii. 27.

⁴John Dury, An Epistolary Discourse, apud Carter, "The Presbyterian-Independent Controversy," p. 55.

⁵An Ansvvere to a Sermon, II, p. 93.

Texts in Conflict

There were, of course, a multitude of texts cited on all sides of the polity conflict, as proofs for the parts of one system or another. But a handful of them are noteworthy for having been the real battleground, referred to time and again by the men on both sides, so that one's exegesis of comparatively few verses determined his position on church government (or vice versa).

The controversy centered on one particular verse exemplifies very well some striking features of exegesis in the field of polity. The verse is Revelation 1:20, and the question was, who were the Angels of the Seven Churches? On April 17th, 1608, Dr. George Downname preached a sermon at the consecration of James Montague as Bishop of Bath and Wells. He innocently chose this text, "the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches"; a decision he was given cause to regret. He said the angels were Diocesan Bishops, and that this proved the lawfulness of the Bishop's office. He backed up his conclusion largely by Patristic testimony, and the force of his argument was that Bishops were necessary, not to the being (esse) of the Church, but only to its well-being (bene-esse). This was not a particularly distinguished position, and Downname suffered for it. What is notable is that both his major attackers (one anonymous, and the other the famous Paul Baynes) were what he called "new-found parish disciplinarians," i.e. Congregational Independents; that subsequent to this, nearly every writer on polity was compelled to make at least passing reference to the angels; and that Baynes' book, The Diocesans

Tryall, was one of the most often-cited books in the ensuing struggle over Church government, both by Presbyterians and (especially New England) Independents.

As for the text itself, it did not so much determine, as reflect, the opinions of the authors who handled it. To the prelatical party, as we have seen, the angels were Diocesan Bishops. To the "Classical" men, each angel was a Presbytery or Classis, including lay-elders,¹ and excluding the body of church members.² To Downname's anonymous opponent, as to Baynes, the angels were certainly Bishops, but the Bishops were "Ministers, Pastours onely of particular congregations."³ Each group claimed this text for its own, seemingly quite untroubled that the others could produce just as many authorities for mutually exclusive positions as they did. The text was, of course, exceptionally liable to this kind of treatment, being "allegorical, as himself [Downname] confesseth."⁴ Like a weather-vane, it was free to turn with the wind. Other texts were more like signposts; it required some digging to make them point in the direction one assumed Jerusalem to lie.

Texts in Common

One set of texts was appealed to both by Presbyterians and Congregationalists as their warrant for the several officers set

¹Smectymnuus, An Answer, pp. 53, 157. Cotton agreed that it was a Presbytery, but a congregational one; see John Cotton, The Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England (1645), p. 49.

²Baylie, Dissvative, pp. 193, 220.

³An Ansvvere to a Sermon, II. p. 2.

⁴Idem.

up within each congregation. There were three texts which were so often used and so familiar, by 1641, that the authors of one Presbyterian tract felt they need only mention them in the margin.¹ They were "those three knowne Texts of Scripture," I Timothy 5:17, I Corinthians 12:28, and Romans 12:8.²

I Timothy 5:17; "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." This text seemed clear enough at first glance, and both sides used it as their chief authority for Ruling Elders. But it became obvious that there was more than one possible interpretation: (1) There was only one class of Presbyters; all of them ruled, and some of them preached as well;³ the latter were to be held in higher esteem and/or paid more than the former.⁴ (2) There were two kinds of Presbyters; (a) those who ruled and those who ruled "well," i.e. by preaching and

¹Smectymnuus, Answer, p. 62 margin.

²Their ambiguity is indicated in Hall's remark on this passage of Smectymnuus, "You do wisely to omit those three knowne Texts, which the world knows have beene so thoroughly canvased and eluded," Defence, p. 136. Eyes without "Geneva spectacles" had great difficulty finding in them a clear warrant for Pastors (and Teachers), Ruling Elders, and Deacons, or for their functions.

³Alternatively, all the elders preached and taught, but some worked harder at it, and so deserved higher pay; emphasising κοπιῶντες, taking it to mean laborious study and exercise of one's gifts, as opposed to merely passable work.

⁴"But the principall burden and chiefe worke of the Ministry, for which double honour is especially due to Ministers, is the preaching, that is, the expounding and applying of the word." George Downame, Two Sermons &c. (1608), I. p. 17f.

teaching; alternatively, (b) those who ruled well (only), and those who ruled well and also handled the teaching and preaching. (3) Or else there were three kinds of Presbyters: those who ruled indifferently and received a standard wage, those who ruled efficiently and received a double wage, and those who worked in word and doctrine.

Needless to say, Presbyterians and Independents (including those in New England) settled for the second alternative under (2).¹ This was the pattern of the Reformed Communions, and there was no reason for the Independents to alter it; although in some New-England Churches the "onely-ruling elders" were few, and later mostly disappeared, leaving Pastor and Teacher to manage affairs between them.² The chief difference was that Ruling Elders in the Independent Churches shared with the Pastors and Teachers, within the Congregational Eldership, final authority in excommunication and ordination, the latter of which was not a property of Presbyterian Ruling Elders, in most Reformed polity.

However, the fact was that this text offered no clear, unmistakable likeness of only-Ruling Elders, but was open to a number of different interpretations. As Downname pointed out, this was one of the two places on which "the whole cause of the

¹Jus Divinum, p. 142. Cotton, The Way of the Churches, p. 26f.

²This was not, however, general New England theory; Cotton especially had a high esteem for Ruling Elders, who admitted and excommunicated members, ordained, admonished, prepared matters for the brethren, moderated meetings, and visited the sick; see idem.

Lay-Elders relieth."¹ It seemed to grant the question so easily, that Calvin assumed that all his readers would hold the same view of it without any question.² But to the Prelates, it appeared too sandy a foundation for such a great building as was confidently erected thereupon.³

I Corinthians 12:28; "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." Churchmen of many ages have wished the Apostle had been a bit more consistent about details; even ages such as the Puritan era, which did not grant the possibility of the slightest inconsistency in Scripture. A particular difficulty

¹Downname, Defence, I. p. 77; cf. I. p. 164f. The other place, being extra-scriptural, was infrequently appealed to, especially as time went on; it was Origen's comment on I Tim. 5, "whence both the Synagogue, and afterwards the Church had elders, without whose counsel nothing was done in the Church. How this passed into neglect I do not know, unless perhaps by the neglect, or more likely the pride, of the Teachers, who alone would be seen to be something." The Puritans could not base a conclusive argument on this merely human testimony.

²See John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. Henry Beveridge (2 vols.; Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1957), IV. xi. 1; II. viii. 35.

³One major problem, usually ignored or passed over evasively by both Presbyterians and Independents (see esp. Cotton, The Way of the Churches, p. 25f, who ignored the whole embarrassing point in a way quite unlike him; cf. [George Gillespie] An Assertion of The Government of the Church of Scotland [Edinburgh, 1641], p. 106), is that the text viewed in its context obviously demands maintenance, or salary, for all the elders listed here; and Ruling Elders, as Bishop Bilson and Dr. Downname both pointed out (see Downname, Defence, I. p. 123), did not get paid by Reformed or Independent Churches. The usual excuse was, that although they deserved pay, they did not need it; "a poore shift!"

in this case arose from the discrepancies between the various lists of "church officers" in the New Testament (e.g. I Corinthians 12:28, 12:29f, Ephesians 4:11, Romans 12:8ff).

It was possible to make sense out of them individually, but they did not collate readily.

The first task with this particular verse was to make it prove Pastors (and Teachers), Ruling Elders, and Deacons. The solution was very neat:

The Enumeration here made, is evidently an Enumeration of severall sorts of Church-officers, some extraordinary to dure but for a time, some ordinary to continue constantly in the Church;. . . the severall officers enumerated . . . are either Extraordinary, these five, viz. Apostles, Prophets, Powers or Miracles, Gifts of Healing, and Kindes of Tongues; these continued but for a season. . . . Or Ordinary, these three, viz. Teachers (there's the Preaching Elder), Governments (there's the Ruling Elder), Helps (there's the Deacon)."¹

All were regarded, not as general categories, but as special kinds of officers.²

¹Jus Divinum, p. 131. They admitted that there were other officers listed elsewhere, but maintained "yet this is undoubtedly evident, that it is an Enumeration of officers in the Church"; idem. James Noyes, one of the Elders in the "Presbyterian" Church at Newbury in New England favoured the view that the Apostle is here speaking primarily, not of officers, but of gifts which were common to officers and members alike; The Temple Measured (1646), pp. 18-21. His view on this matter was rather unusual.

²See Jus Divinum, pp. 38, 137. If any of these categories was general, it was certainly κυβερνήσεις, Governments; yet it can only be useful as an authorisation for the Ruling Elder if it refers to a specific office. The same is true of ἀντιλήμψεις, Helps; if it is a general category, it cannot be an authorisation for the specific office of the Deacon. Sensing this difficulty, Hudson said frankly, "what the meaning of the holy Ghost is herein I cannot affirm"; Vindication, p. 52; cf. p. 236.

New England Independents emphasised that this text must be explained with the help of Ephesians 4:11, and that (just as the "Evangelists" mentioned there are here comprehended under "Prophets," so) "Teachers" in this text must be understood as including the "Pastors" mentioned there, since "the office of both . . . was to teach."¹ This, especially, is a good example of the importance of the tenet mentioned earlier, the assumption that the government of the Apostolic Churches was everywhere identical, with identical officers; hence this somewhat forced attempt to collate differing lists of what might, to some extent, have been the members' various gifts, rather than ecclesiastical officers.

A second problem which arose from this text, and which is of more importance for our subject, was the question, "in what Church did God set these officers?" To the Presbyterians, it was clear that since Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists belonged to no specific local Church, when Paul says *ἔθετο ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ*, "God set in the Church . . . ", he speaks of the general visible Church, not of a congregation.² This point was so problematical for the Independents that they usually passed it by on the other side. John Cotton could only protest that the Apostolic Church (the pattern!) was exceptional in having universal officers, and

¹Cotton, The Way of the Churches, p. 16.

²Jus Divinum, p. 3f, cf. p. 67; see also, Richard Hollingworth, Certain Queres Modestly (though plainly) Propounded to such as affect the Congregational-way (1646), p. 19.

he maintained that to set ordinary officers over more than one congregation "is incompatible to the Church of the new Testament. The Lord having instituted and ordained no particular Church; but the Church of a Congregation."¹ Cotton was not normally seen pleading his conclusion to prove a step in the argument; he was usually too competent a logician to be caught "begging the question."

Romans 12:6-8; "having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." This is an even more general passage, usually expounded according to the system already educed from I Corinthians 12:28. The general Puritan tone was set by the London Ministers:

"here we have a very excellent and perfect enumeration of all the ordinary standing officers in the Church of Christ distinctly laid down."² The exposition was carefully worked out: there are two general types of office in the Church, "prophecy" and "ministry"; "prophecy" (understood as the ordinary gift of understanding and interpreting Scripture) contains "1. He that Teacheth, i.e. the Doctour or Teacher. 2. He that exhorteth, i.e. The Pastour";³ while "Ministry" includes "1. He that giveth,

¹Cotton, Way of the Churches, p. 18.

²Jus Divinum, p. 118.

³Ibid., p. 117.

i.e. the Deacon. 2. He that ruleth, i.e. the Ruling Elder."¹

Texts in Controversy

The texts which follow, like those above, were common ground for the Classical and Congregational brethren; but in this case, each side laboured mightily to dislodge the other.

Matthew 16:19; "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." It is needless to point out that this text has always been a center of controversy, or that nearly every interpretation of it which is made in favor of one concrete church polity or another, seems to involve the interpreter in some absurdity.

The Independent use of this text raised three important issues: the subject who received the power of the keys; the

¹Idem. The enumeration of these functions as distinct offices runs aground on the Deacon, who, the Londoners said, "giveth, and sheweth mercy" (ibid, p. 121). If one office can be listed under two functions, there is just reason for questioning the one-gift-for-one-office enumeration posited for the other functions listed in the text. James Noyes made just this point in his argument that what we have here is a list of gifts given to all, members as well as officers, and that there is but one sort of teaching officer, who may find that he personally is more gifted either to teach or to exhort (see Noyes, The Temple measured, pp. 18-21; for Cotton's attitude on the point, see his Way of the Churches, p. 11f; for an answer to this kind of argument, see Gillespie, Assertion, p. 36f).

²The fact that these texts were the ones most often in dispute, especially between the New Englanders and the Old English Presbyterians, shows clearly that the most vital point in question between the two factions, practically as well as theoretically, was the question of appeal. Both sides knew that the judicatory at which church censures finally came to rest, was supreme; beside this, other considerations of polity were secondary.

nature of the keys themselves; and the implications of verse 18 for church membership. The most important question was, "Who is the subject recipient of this power . . .?"¹ Of course, it was given to Peter; "But," as Cotton observed, "it hath proved a busie Question, How Peter is to be considered in receiving this power of the keys, whether as an Apostle, or as an Elder, . . . or as a Beleever professing his faith."² Many earlier Independents and Separatists had favored the latter interpretation,³ as did those leading lights of New England, John Cotton,⁴ Richard Mather,⁵ and Thomas Hooker,⁶ stating emphatically that Peter is here representative of the disciples and all other believers; so the keys of church government are not given first to Apostles or Elders, but "the Keyes are committed to all Believers that shall joine together in the same confession, according to the order and ordinance of Christ."

¹John Cotton, The keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven (1644), p. 1.

²Ibid, p. 4.

³John Ball, who was familiar with the works of Greenwood, Smith, Johnson, Robinson, Ainsworth, and Jacob, characterised the Separatist position thus: "The keyes of the kingdome of heaven were promised and given to Peter as to a faithfull man, and so to all the faithfull. . . . Whereupon it followeth necessarily, that one faithfull man, yea or woman either, may as truly and effectually loose or bind both in heaven and earth as all the ministers in the world" (Friendly Tryall, p. 241).

⁴See Cotton, Way of the Churches, p. 27.

⁵See Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discvssed, I. p. 45 (the book is anonymous, but Mather probably compiled most of it).

⁶See Hooker, Survey, I. pp. 192-199.

⁷Idem.

This position had three major disadvantages: (1) it meant that the Apostles as Apostles did not derive their office directly from Christ; (2) it was known to have been held by Separatists;¹ and (3) it was open to the obloquy of Morellianism, or democracy, since it implied that believers could exercise the power of the keys as believers alone. Obviously, some modification was called for to make the text comfortable for the New England churches, high in their view of Apostolic authority, non-separating in theory and policy, and orthodoxly "Aristocraticall" in plan as well as practice of Church government. This modification was undertaken by John Cotton, who changed horses in mid-stream without seeming to abandon his first mount. Speaking of the three ways of considering Peter in this text (Apostle, Elder, or believer), he said in The Keyes (1644), "Now because wee are as well studious of peace, as of truth, we will not leane to one of these interpretations, more than to another. Take any one of them, it will not hinder our purpose".² He was rather embarrassed by the publication, in 1645, of his earlier work, The Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England (it had already been circulating in manuscript for some time³ before it was published without

¹A special encumbrance to the New-Englanders, who, as Perry Miller points out, were eager to be, and to be known as, non-separating Independents (see his Orthodoxy in Massachusetts [Boston, Massachusetts, 1933], pp. 84, 100f note, and chap. iv, passim.)

²Cotton, Keyes, p. 4.

³see [Daniel Cawdrey], Vindiciae Clavium: or, A Vindication of the Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven (1645), p. 2.

Cotton's consent). As an opposing tract (Vindiciae Clavium) was quick to point out, Cotton's earlier position was directly contradictory to that given in the Keyes, for he had said, "the power of the Keys is given to the Church, to Peter, not as an Apostle, nor as an Elder, but as a profest believer; in the name of believers, and upon occasion of the profession of his faith, . . . whereupon the binding and loosing (which is the power of the Keys) is attributed to the whole Church."¹ As embarrassing as the earlier position was, the New Englanders could not abandon it.² So Cotton simply added to it that the keys had been given to Peter in three respects: as to an Apostle, in company with his fellow Apostles; as to the Elders of particular churches; and as to the members of these churches, in company with their Elders ("If Peter then received the whole power of the Keys, then he stood in the roome and name of all such, as have received any part of the power of the Keys, whether Apostles or Elders, or Churches."³). Then, in case he should be called to account for his earlier position, he said that even if Peter "stood in the roome of an Apostle only," yet the other Apostles, as well as Elders, received like power, "there or elsewhere," and even each congregation in some way and in some place "received that portion also of Church-power which belonged to them."⁴

¹Cotton, Way, p. 27.

²Without this interpretation of this particular text, Congregational theory would have been drastically weakened.

³Cotton, Keyes, p. 5.

⁴Idem.

He had need of his careful hedging, for he could not but be aware of the novelty of his opinion, and the objections likely to be raised against it. There were, in fact, three important objections: (1) that Apostolic power and believers' power, being of two different kinds, could not be given in the same act; (2) the fact that Peter's confession was the occasion of his receiving the keys, did not make it the cause; the Church is indeed built on the confession, but the keys thereof are given to Peter and such as Peter, not simply to "profest beleevers";¹ and (3) all the keys named in this text and context, being keys of authority, were given to the Apostles as Church-governors, and not one key to the Apostles and one to believers, severally;² what Cotton called "some part of the exercise of the power of the Keys," being "consent to the sentence," and "actuall execution of it, by withdrawing themselves from the offender so convicted and censured,"³ was no real power of the keys, but only hearing the "gingling of the Keyes";⁴ it was but passive obedience to the real power of the Elders. Here was the New England polity dilemma: the democratic heresy was an important foundation stone of the theoretical structure; how could it be kept in theory, without giving it its right name, and without allowing it to erupt in practice?

¹See Baylie, Dissvative, p. 189f; Cawdrey, Vindiciae Clavium, p. 7f.

²See Jus Divinum, p. 79; Noyes, Temple measured, p. 32.

³Cotton, Keyes, p. 5.

⁴Cawdrey, op. cit., p. 8.

A second controversy in the interpretation of this text was, just what were these keys? Calvin had said that they were the keys of binding and loosing (i.e. of retaining and remitting sins, by preaching the Word and acts of discipline), committed to all the Apostles, and hence to all Ministers.¹ The most usual distribution of the keys, according to Cotton, had been as follows:

1. The key of knowledge.
2. The key of power, containing
 - a. The key of order, and
 - b. The key of jurisdiction.²

His real objection was that none of these keys was designed to be used by the brethren; the Presbyterians put the keys on one ring and handed them to the officers, as keys of authority; Cotton had to find one to give the brethren, which yet carried no authority of rule with it. His division, therefore, was as follows:

1. The key of knowledge ("or which is all one, the key of Faith"³), by which one enters into the kingdom of heaven.
2. The key of order, by which each walks orderly in his place; containing
 - a. Power, interest, or liberty of the people, to enter the Church, to choose officers, to partake in the Sacraments, to join in the censures; and
 - b. Authority or rule, in the Elders, in preaching, administering the Seals, and, with the Church, binding and loosing in the censures.⁴

¹Institutes, IV. xi. 1 & 2.

²See Keyes, p. 5f.

³Ibid., p. 11.

⁴Ibid., pp. 7-10.

The opposition criticism of this novel arrangement was based on one position: the keys of the household are given to its stewards, not to the body of its members. Therefore: (1) this "key of power" is really "no-power," since "interest" or "liberty" is merely passive; thus it is not a key, keys being symbolic only of authority or rule; (2) the key of knowledge is not given to those outside the Church (as it must be, if it admits to the Church), since it is an official church-key (that is, of preaching); and (3) how can the people be given power in the censures, and not in preaching and the seals?¹ Furthermore, this seems clearly to be an interpretation based on the system it is supposed to prove.

A third point made by the Independents, based actually on verse 18 ("upon this rock will I build my church"), was that if, as most Protestant interpreters agreed, the "rock" mentioned here was Peter's confession, then the Church must be founded thereupon; that is to say, since a profession of Jesus as the Christ, the son of God, which was not merely verbal but inspired by the Holy Spirit, was said by Christ to be the foundation-rock of each particular church, "then wee shall build a Church without a foundation, if wee receive such members into the Church as doe not hold forth such a profession."² Robert Baylie objected: (1) that the Church referred to here was the Catholic visible Church; (2) that the Church's foundation rock was the Christ

¹Cawdrey, Vindiciae Clavium, pp. 8ff.

²Cotton, Way, p. 57; cf. p. 5.

Peter confessed, not the confession, which might fail, and (3) to limit Church membership to those who are elect and filled with the Holy Ghost meant "the Anabaptists have won the field." And in any event, said Baylie, that confession did not make Peter a Church member, since he already was one.¹

The major question in the case of this text was one of appeal; the Independents sought to give to the congregation the theoretical and practical right to be the final ecclesiastical court: theoretical, since it was the only new thing Cotton's re-division of the keys gave them; and practical, since one aim of testing the applicants' confessions was to provide for this church court members worthy to be of the final tribunal, before the bar of Heaven.

Matthew 18:17; "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." The principal question was, again, one of appeal: "tell the church"; but what is meant by Church? must appeals in discipline go no further than the local congregation? A subordinate question was whether "Church" meant the whole congregation, or just the ecclesiastical governors.

Paul Baynes, in discussing this text, early rejected appeals to super-Churches or councils on the ground that the Church Christ speaks of here "is such a church as any brother offended may

¹Baylie, Dissvative, p. 169f.

presently complaine to."¹ And John Ball, in 1640, characterising the Separatists' view, agreed that by "Church" here, they meant "the congregation or assembly whereof the offender is a member. . . . without any forrein aid or assistance."²

The two major Presbyterian objections against this interpretation are found together in Herle's The Independency on Scripture: "this is spoken by our Saviour Christ, in reference to the Jewish Church Government" (therefore he had tacitly approved of appeals from congregations to higher judicatories in a nation, as from the synagogues to the Sanhedrin); and "an indefinit command where the duty is of necessary concernment is equall to a Universall," or, in other words, "the remedy of complaint or Appeale, must be as large as the malady offence; otherwise Christs salve were not equall to the soare."³

As to the first objection, that Christ here referred to the Jewish polity (the Christian Church not yet being in existence), New England opinion was not unanimous. Mather and Tompson agreed with Herle, but used the standard Independent argument that Jewish national polity was now completed in single Christian congregations, so that appeals could go no farther than the congregation.⁴

¹Baynes, Diocesans Tryall, p. 80; a phrase very popular with Congregationalists.

²Ball, Friendly Triall, p. 258.

³Charles Herle, The Independency on Scriptures of the Independency of Churches (1643), p. 9f; the latter simile was very popular with Presbyterians; for another example of the former argument, see Hudson, Vindication, p. 207.

⁴Richard Mather and William Tompson, A Modest & Brotherly Ansvver to Mr. Charles Herle (1644), p. 22ff.

But Cotton disagreed, saying that Christ here referred to the Church, and used the words "heathen and publican" as types or figures.¹ The second objection was based (1) on the possibility of cases outside the jurisdiction of a single congregation, and (2) on the maxim "that the offended party be not against all equity, the sole and finall Judge of the offence."² Both objections were put forward in defence of "Dependency, and liberty of Appeal."

This second Presbyterian objection, that "Christs salve" must be "equall to the soare", was also the major device used by the Classical controversialists in their attempt to extract their own authorisation for graduated appeals from what is, as it stands, an Independent text (since it contains no word of Classes, Synods, Assemblies, or General Councils).³ It was an exclusively logical, prudential argument: that it was small honour to Christ's provision for his Church, if his remedy could not reach to cover the offence; and offences might fall out between congregations, or between the brethren and elders of a single congregation, leaving no one competent to judge and conclude the matter. The logical device used here was proportion: the Presbyterians said the text

¹Cotton, Keyes, p. 39.

²Herle, loc. cit.

³See Ellis, Vindiciae Catholicae, p. 21f.

was but one example of a system that was to stretch up as far as it was needed.¹ Richard Mather provided the reductio ad absurdum:

For my part, I know no reason, but if the Congregation be lyable to the censure of Classes and Synods by this Scripture; because our Saviours remedy is a Church remedy, by the same reason the Classes and Synods must be lyable to censure also; yea, and the nationall Church likewise.²

A system which thus made necessary a General Council, he pointed out, was small honour to Christ, as it demanded what had not been seen in the Church for centuries, nor was ever likely to be; thus all the lesser judicatories were incomplete, and Christ's remedy imperfect. The Congregational alternative was, take the text as it stands, and go no farther; let the congregation be the supreme judicatory, and you have a court that is both constantly available and swift to act.³

The other important question about this text, i.e. whether by "church" was meant the whole congregation, or just the ecclesiastical governors, is subordinate because in effect the government of both New England Independent, and Presbyterian Churches, was far from democratic.⁴ It is true that in New England

¹"Now all these five graduall Iffs in the Text . . . they are all indefinit, not restrained to this or that particular (however in the word, brother, there be a Senecdoche, a single person, named for either more or lesse, Church or Member) and so these indefinit iffs, must be as large as the matter it self, spoken of, either the occasion offence, or the duty complaint"; Herle, loc. cit.; cf. Willem Apollonius, A Consideration of Certain Controversies at this time agitated in the Kingdome of England (1645), pp. 94-96.

²Richard Mather, A Reply to Mr. Rutherford, or A defence of the Answer to Reverend Mr. Herles Booke &c. (1647), p. 86.

³See Hooker, Survey, I. p. 130f.

⁴See Appendix B.

most congregations had the right to take part in censures: but the part was usually only that of silent consent to the Elders' predetermined course.¹ Baynes, the Independents' great mentor, had been admirably pithy: by "church" here, he said, Christ does "not understand essentially all the congregation"; the fact that "he doth presuppose it as the ordinarie executioner of all discipline and censure" shows it is not the body of the brethren, since "the multitude have not this execution ordinarie, as all but Morelius, and such Democraticall spirits doe affirme."²

In this, most orthodox writers agreed with him; this was an area where there was little difference, at least in practice, between Presbyterians and Independents.³ The Church, as Ball

¹Parker and Noyes in New England were quite Presbyterian in this, giving their congregation at Newbury no part in the censures at all. When some of their Church complained, the other Elders of the Bay called the Ministers to task on this account. However, they seem to have realised that the difference was not basic, and the result of the two systems roughly the same. The matter was quietly dropped; see John Winthrop, A Journal of the Transactions and Occurrences in the settlement of Massachusetts and the other New-England Colonies (Hartford, Connecticut, 1790), p. 309.

²Diocesans Tryall, p. 80. Presbyterians were not blind to the advantage this admission gave them; see Jus Divinum, p. 97.

³For the Presbyterian view, see e.g. Jus Divinum, pp. 180, 184, and (in New England) Noyes, Temple Measured, pp. 41-48; he argued that Christ was referring to the Jewish Church, where, as Calvin, Ainsworth, Cartwright and Rutherford agreed (commenting on Numbers 35, and Deuteronomy 19:12), the authoritative Church was always the Elders. He also maintained that the "two or three" in verse 19 referred to the Elders (Cotton argued that they were the witnesses [Way, p. 53], Mather and Tompson that they were just a figure of speech [Modest & Brotherly, p. 2]).

pointed out, can logically be taken for the Elders alone, just as I am said to see when my eye sees.¹ Cotton protested that the word "church" is never used, in Scripture, for the Elders sitting alone, but for the congregation joining with them, and having the right to refuse to execute their sentence,² although he was careful to point out that the liberty they have is principally to execute the sentence of the Elders.³ In owning this practice, Independents had come all the way from the authority of the people alone, to the idea of the people acting with and through their officers, and thence to their practice of the officers acting with the people's (passive) consent; moreover, since the officers were the ones who were told of the offence, they were the "church" of "tell the church." This was Robert Baylie's shrewd observation,⁴ and this, he pointed out, the best of the "adversaries" now allowed.⁵ Idealism had once dreamed of pure democracy; practical experience taught Independents a strict aristocracy.

I Corinthians 5:13; "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." This whole chapter was frequently used by Independents, sometimes by itself, and sometimes as an explication

¹See Ball, Friendly Triall, p. 266.

²See Cotton, Keyes, p. 41f; cf. his Way, p. 97.

³See ibid., p. 100.

⁴See Baylie, Dissvative, p. 190f.

⁵See Ibid., p. 216.

of what was meant by "church" in Matthew 18:17;¹ their basic position was expressed by Cotton: "as the reproofe is directed to them all, . . . so is the Commandment directed to them all, when they are gathered together, to proceed unto the casting of him out."² This common Independent-Separatist argument was commonly met in the same way: the Presbyterians admitted that all are addressed here, but replied; "Everywhere in Scripture indefinite propositions must be expounded according as other Scriptures declare the nature of the matter in hand":³ that is, for example, women and children do not act herein, since other texts disqualify them; and if they can be disqualified, then others as well, until only the officers are left.⁴ Baylie again observed that in practice the Independents (especially in New England) give the people only "a Judgement of discretion, not of any judicall and authoritative Judgement, which alone is in question."⁵ Whether they talked of liberty or power, obedience or interest, in effect most Puritan Elders gave their congregations the right to follow their leaders, whilst the Presbyters adroitly arranged things behind the scenes.

¹See Christ on His Throne, p. 66.

²Cotton, Way, p. 99.

³Baylie, op. cit., p. 192.

⁴See idem; Ball, Friendly Triall, p. 266f; Noyes, op. cit., p. 42f; Jus Divinum, p. 97; Apollonius, Consideration, pp. 64ff.

⁵Baylie, loc. cit.

Acts 15:28; "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things." Charles Herle was annoyed that this whole chapter of Scripture should suddenly be wrested from the Presbyterian grasp, and set as a seal to the Independent concept of the Synod; but he was confident he could wrest it back again.¹ The issues were, what type of Synod was this, ordinary or extraordinary; and what was its authority? The latter issue was the decisive one.

The Presbyterians generally claimed that this was an ordinary Synod, hence making it a pattern to be imitated.² Under this assumption, in fact, this chapter became the major authorization for the powers of a Presbyterian Synod: "Here's all that goes to the making up of a compleat Synod:"³ (1) "an Authoritative Mission of delegated Officers from the Presbyteriall Church at Antioch, (and probably from other Churches of Syria and Cilicia also . . .)";⁴ (2) the Apostles and Evangelists "acted not in this Synod by a transcendent infallible Apostolicall power, but by an ordinary power; as Elders";⁵ (3) "because the manner of proceeding in this Synod convened, was not extraordinary and Apostolicall, . . . But ordinary . . . stating the Question, prooffe and evidence from Scripture . . . concluding, It seemed good to the holy Ghost, and to us, . . . which words, any Assembly, having like cleare evidence

¹See Herle, Independency, p. 19.

²See Apollonius, Consideration, p. 93f.

³Idem.

⁴Jus Divinum, p. 221.

⁵Ibid., p. 222.

of Scripture for their determination, may without presumption use, as well as this Synod did."¹ These arguments were an attempt to plug up the hole the Independents had blown in the Classical dyke: they claimed that the Synod in Acts 15 was extraordinary, and hence could be no pattern for us now. There were three arguments: (1) it cannot be proved that Paul and Barnabas were delegates from Antioch, or in fact that any of the Apostles and Elders there acted as delegates; nor that Syria and Cilicia had delegates at the meeting;² (2) the Apostles acted as Apostles, infallibly (which was no more hindered by the presence of Elders, than is the inspiration of Paul's letters diminished by his co-signers³); (3) they "could say without the least hesitancy or doubting, It seemeth good to the holy Ghost and to us: And can any Assembly or Synod of Ministers do so now?"⁴

All this disputation took place in Old England. But there was a surprising volte-face in New England, where Independents were defending this Apostolic gathering as an ordinary Synod, a pattern for the Church to follow. Mather and Thompson, answering Charles Herle in 1644, quietly adopted his grounds as far as to say "that matters were carried in it, in way of an ordinarie

¹Ibid., p. 223. For these three points, see also Herle, op. cit., pp. 19-25.

²M.S. to A.S. with A Plea for Libertie of Conscience (1644), p. 68f, et passim; cf. Herle, Independency, pp. 20, 23.

³Henry Burton, A Vindication of the Churches, commonly called Independent (1644), pp. 65-69.

⁴William Bartlet, IXNOΓPAΘIA. Or A Model of The Primitive Congregational way (1647), p. 133; cf. Burton, loc. cit.

Synod,"¹ using the same ordinary means, "viz. much disputation."² This may be partly explained by the Antinomian Crisis in the Bay in 1637, which made urgent the need for a consultative Synod to condemn doctrinal errors, and hence required that this text be freed to provide grounds for New England's first Synod.

But this did not change the New Englanders' view on the main issue: they strongly opposed the Presbyterian position that the Synod was juridical in its authority, and instead claimed that it was merely doctrinal.

The Presbyterian contention that the Synod had judicial authority was based (1) on the fact that Antioch sent for help, which they said implied that in a difficult case, where the Church was divided, and other Churches involved in the same problem, they had no right to end the matter among themselves;³ and (2) on the action taken at the Synod, which they claimed was jurisdictional: (a) in giving out a censure, the first step in ecclesiastical jurisdiction; and (b) in imposing doctrinal rules, binding the Churches to obedience thereto, which the Churches accepted.⁴

To this the Independents answered, (1) "Antioch had right and Authority to have ended the matter amongst themselves if

¹Mather and Tompson, Modest & Brotherly, p. 40.

²Ibid., p. 41; cf. Hooker, Survey, IV, pp. 3-5.

³See Jus Divinum, p. 220f.

⁴See Herle, op. cit., p. 24f; Jus Divinum, pp. 225-229; Apollonius, loc. cit.

ability had served thereto; and their sending to Ierusalem for helpe may argue want of argeement [sic] or imperfection of light, but argues no want of Authority or right within themselves"¹

(because otherwise they would have been guilty of presumptive sin in even trying to settle the matter themselves first); and (2) "it seems the imposing these burdens, was not so properly an act of jurisdiction, and discipline, as an act of Doctrine."²

There was no proof that the Presbyterians could allege, from the text or elsewhere, that the council was prepared to go on to any judicial act if their recommendations were not heeded; neither was any authoritative censure of the false teachers implied; but the carrying out of all discipline was left to the presbytery of the individual congregation (as, if a father should seek a neighbour's advice in the discipline of his own children, it did not therefore follow that the neighbour had the right to execute the punishment).³

The Synod, said Mather and Tompson, taking Acts 15 as a model pattern, does indeed have power to bind doctrinally, and to determine questions of heresy and false teaching, with all authority;⁴ but

¹Mather, Reply to Rutherford, p. 29; cf. Mather and Tompson, op. cit., p. 42.

²Ibid., p. 43.

³Bartlet, A Model of The Primitive Congregational way, p. 134; Mather and Tompson, op. cit., p. 42; M.S. to A.S., p. 68f.

⁴See Mather and Tompson, op. cit., pp. 1, 3.

all this that is here said by the Presbyterians , goeth no further, but onely to shew that there ought to be Synods; whereas the question is about the power of Synods, and how far the same doth reach, whether so far as that a Synod onely (and not a particular congregation) ought to ordain officers, and excommunicate offenders: and between these two is a wide difference.¹

¹Ibid., p. 40.

II. THE CHURCH (1) The Conflict

Though the differences and contests . . . are now grown to a woful height, to desperate distances and heart burnings; yet the foundation is in this seemingly slight Logical question, an Ecclesia instituta sit genus an integrum? . . . That this is the bottom question hence appears, that the other contrary apprehensions in Church discipline, are mostly the contrary consequences and deductions flowing from these two opposite principles.

--Samuel Mather, in Samuel Stone,
A Congregational Church,
sig. A2 recto.

Some Terms Defined

Throughout Christendom, events of a widely disparate nature had thrown up one fact: the Church could change. More than that, the Church could be changed. It was a new idea, and it startled men everywhere. It caused many to see visions and dream dreams. It was often coupled with the kind of millennial expectation which we have already noted,¹ which awaited not so much a visible personal return of the Saviour on the clouds, as a perfecting of his Church on earth (whether gradually or abruptly) until, for the first time since the days of the Apostles, it became truly and fully his once more. To purify the Church according to the Apostolic pattern was to bring in the Kingdom of God.

¹See above, pp. 17-19.



This entailed asking questions about the Church.

Independents were men who asked themselves a particular group of questions; but the New England Independents were the ones who had the best opportunity, not only to ask their questions, but to see how their answers worked out in practice. And like all Puritans, they asked their questions, and found their answers, with the Word of God open in front of them.

The Church

What is a 'Church'? The question had first to be asked of the Bible, and in a semantic sense. When the word 'Church' turns up on the pages of the New Testament, does it ever refer to an organic entity larger than a single congregation? According to Paul Baynes, the answer was no (unless, of course, the word were modified).¹ His followers were just as negative about this as he was: "We do not know any visible Church of the N.T. properly so called, but onely a particular Congregation. . . . all visible Churches are Congregationall, as Mr. Baine sheweth at large."² The plural, never the singular, was always used when the churches³ of a province or kingdom were referred to.

In this, some Presbyterians seemed to agree with them: "For the Apostles were alwaies exact in distinguishing Churches: that

¹Baynes, Diocesans Tryall, p. 4. He added that the word 'church' is never used of the Ministers by themselves; this later proved an embarrassment to the New Englanders.

²Church-Government &c., I. p. 9f.

³To avoid confusion, I shall refer to a congregation as a 'church' and anything else as a 'Church.'

of a City, they alwaies called a Church; those of a Province, Churches."¹ The difference lay in the fact that Presbyterians contended that the Churches of the New Testament cities were presbyterial, that is, the numbers of Christians in these cities was so large that they could not all meet in one place, and therefore what the New Testament called the 'Church' of such a city was really the congregation of the city's Presbyters (or else the total number of the city's Christians). To vindicate their belief against this reasonable and damaging hypothesis, Independents had to contend, city by New Testament city, for one single congregation per metropolis; even if, as their opponents showed, there must at some time have been at least eight thousand one hundred and twenty members in the Church of Jerusalem.² Indeed, it may be said that the issue pivoted on the Jerusalem Church; as for the churches elsewhere, the Independents had the stronger case,³ while their opponents dealt mainly with doubtful inferences or unprovable assertions.⁴ But in Jerusalem, it seems clear from the records that there were a great many people in the Church, so many as to have admittedly required something bigger than the largest Church building in seventeenth century London (unless they had spread themselves in their thousands across a

¹Smectymnuus, Vindication, p. 122 (misnumbered 126).

²Mather and Thompson, Modest & Brotherly, pp. 65-72; Herle, Independency, p. 12.

³See Mather and Thompson, op. cit., p. 32f.

⁴See Herle, op. cit., pp. 13-16.

field or hillside every week for preaching and the "breaking of bread"). If, however, they met in various houses, as Acts 2:46 seems to imply, then the word 'Church,' as applied to the believers at Jerusalem, signifies a group of congregations. Therefore (on the assumption that the pure Apostolic Church was everywhere the same organization and government, and is the mandatory pattern for the Church in all ages), Churches should be presbyterial.¹

When examining the ways in which the Bible influenced the contemporary uses and understandings of the word 'church,' it must also be noted that contemporary uses and understandings had much to say about what it was possible to see in Scripture itself. For Independents, only two uses of the word 'church' were admissible: as a label for the mystical body of Christ, the congregation of the elect of all ages; or as a title for the local congregation. In the latter sense, the church was defined by Baynes as "a multitude which doe in a manner of a Parish ordinarily congregate; such Churches, and such onely we say God erected."²

¹It must be emphasised that this problem of the New Testament use of the word 'church' was determined by this assumption, that the Apostolic churches were everywhere the same in worship and government (see above, p.13f). If this assumption is not made; if it is assumed, rather, that the churches were governed differently in different cities, and especially that there were marked differences of size and organization between Jerusalem and other (especially the predominantly Gentile) churches, then the many hundreds of pages on the subject by these disputants become almost meaningless (see B.H. Streeter, The Primitive Church [London, 1930], p. viiif). But they made the assumption, and, partly on this basis, these two denominations started down roads which have only recently shown any signs of converging.

²Baynes, Diocesans Tryall, p. 12.

The refusal to use the term in any other sense soon led to the inability to think of it except in that sense (except improperly): "I call it one ordinary congregation, consisting of so many beleivers, as can conveniently meet together to worship God in one place, to make it distinct from all other Societies, or Bodies called Churches, of the same kind."¹ This concept made the church really visible; on Sunday morning one could see it, merely by looking in the doors of the nearest meeting-house. To continue the visual analogy, church members were 'marked off' from others, in a real sense, by separating from the world, making "open profession" of the faith, and showing "the conversation of Christian life conformable thereunto."² The Catholic, or mystical Church, however, was "apprehended only by faith, & not by sight";³ the obvious inference being that the congregation, the 'church', could be apprehended by the senses; it could be seen.⁴

¹Bartlet, Model, p. 34.

²Christ on His Throne, p. 52.

³Idem.

⁴This conception of the visible church as a church which was visible to the eyes of one beholder belongs to the thought-world of Ramist logic; it was originally used as the best weapon with which to oppose the concept of a Diocesan 'Church.' It is the only thing which fully explains Paul Baynes' insistence that the 'Church' of a whole Diocese could not be a church, properly speaking, because it did not meet (visibly) to worship on Sunday (this must have sounded as strange to the Bishops as it does to us); see Diocesans Tryall, p. 9f. Another insight into the thorough-going Independent mentality is provided by their (almost universal) practice of saying, "the Independent Churches," the "Churches of England" (i.e., the English congregations), the "Churches of Christ in New England." They would not have said "The Congregational Church."

In contemporary logic, a genus normally had two (and only two) contrary species; the genus 'Church,' for example, contained two species of Church: the visible, and the invisible. The Independents said that the visible church was simply the local congregation, and the invisible the congregation of the elect. They did not differ philosophically from many of their Presbyterian adversaries; they merely 'filled up' the 'place' or 'topick' 'visible church' with a single local congregation; hence, there was no place in their logical system for any other visible entity called a 'Church'; the Classical, Synodal, National, and Universal Visible Churches simply had no 'place' to exist. The case was closed for them by Baynes' argument: a 'Church', he said "must haue a reall action according to that nature of which it is. . . . The action formall of a Church indefinite is to meet and communicate in worship."¹ Nothing but a congregation had this operation; anything which did not operate according to its (supposed) nature, did not possess that nature.

Church Government

The term 'Church Government' meant nearly the same thing for both sides:

Church-Government is a Power or Authority spirituall, revealed in the holy Scriptures, derived from Jesus Christ our Mediatour, only to his own Officers, and by them exercised in dispensing of the Word, Seales, Censures, and all other Ordinances of Christ, for the edifying of the Church of Christ.²

¹Ibid., p. 9.

²Jus Divinum, p. 35f.

This tallied with Cotton's later Independent theory, as set forth in the Keyes: the power or authority of the officers was granted to them directly from Christ (albeit through the medium of the congregation's election); it did not, as in some Independent theory, come through and from the congregation. To the Presbyterian position that Church power or authority or government was monarchic in Christ and aristocratic in his officers, the New Englanders added that it was democratic in the people.¹

The Kingdom of Christ

When most Independents referred to 'the Kingdom of Christ' or to Christ as 'King', they meant something very specific, viz., Independent church-government. According to New England millennial doctrine, most fully developed by Thomas Hooker, Christ's kingly office, the last to be usurped by the Papacy, was likewise the last then being recovered in the ongoing Reformation;² and it was precisely the refusal of Independent congregations to have any other governor but Christ himself, in his Word, which was the recovering of it. This was clearly stated by the anonymous author of Christ on His Throne:

¹See ibid., p. 39, and Hooker, Survey, I. p. 206. As we shall see (below, Appendix B), the actual power of government which was placed in the hands of the 'brethren' was, even in theory, very small; in practice, it was virtually nil.

²See ibid., sig. A4 recto et seqq.

Now every such particular Congregation as aforesaid, consisting of professed beleivers of the knowne truth of God, according to which they frame the course of their life and conversation, is in it selfe an absolute Church, whose onely Governor for matters of faith, and the true worship of God, is Iesus Christ. He it is that as King reigneth in this congregation, and in all the members therof, they acknowledge none other Governor for matters of Religion, but Christ onely. For herein stands his kingly Office: and the Laws by which this King reigneth, and governeth his Church, is his written Word. And his Vicegerent, by whom Christ is alwayes present with every one of his severall Congregations,¹ is the holy Ghost, which whoso hath not is none of Christs.

Baylie objected that neither Christ's rule over a congregation, nor the Spirit's power over a man "exempts . . . the one nor the other because of their immediate subjection to God and Christ, from the bonds and yoake of any authority, either Ecclesiasticke or Civill, which the Lord hath appointed in holy Scripture."²

The Independents had no objection to this statement, but they could not be convinced that the Lord had, in fact, appointed any yoke for the backs of his congregations but his own direct government. And for them, Congregationalism was not just one denomination among many; it was the end-product of the millenial recovery of the pure Apostolic Church.

'Marks' of the True Church

In accordance with the prevailing philosophical trends of the

¹Christ on His Throne, p. 52f. It is noteworthy that by this theory, Christ's kingly office was made to consist entirely in his government over individual congregations, or, practically speaking, Independent church-government (providential reign over men and nations was the province of God the Father, not the Son).

²Baylie, Dissvative, p. 223.

age, which were, as Fr. Ong has demonstrated,¹ in the direction of treating concepts and categories of logic as though they were 'visible'; and as a result of the attempt to discern the 'one true church' amid a sometimes bewildering variety of religious groups; there was a great contemporary interest in the 'marks', or visible signs of the 'true church.' Calvin's famous formula on the subject is preceded by a sentence which makes his concern with visibility quite obvious:

Hence the form of the Church appears and stands forth conspicuous to our view. Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administred according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence²

(Calvin's formulation, however, exerted little positive influence in this controversy; the closest thing to it was Ball's assertion that "The saving truth of God and a lawfull Ministry, are both essentiall to a true Church."³)

For the famous Franeker professor, William Ames, this was not enough, and he contradicted Calvin: "The profession of the true Faith is the most essentiall note of the Church. This profession may in some company goe before the solemne preaching of the word, and administration of the Sacraments."⁴ Faith gives the Church its "essential state: . . . combination its

¹Walter J. Ong, S.J. Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), pp. 107-112, et passim.

²Calvin, Institutes, IV. i. 9.

³Ball, Tryall, p. 86.

⁴Ames, Marrow, I. xxxii. 29, 30.

integrall state: so also by the Ministry it hath a certaine organically state:" the ordinances of Word and Sacraments have to do, not with the Church's being, but with its well-being.¹ The (Presbyterian) London Ministers explicitly agreed.²

Thomas Hooker in his Survey, the summa of New England polity teaching, went a step further: not only were true preaching, baptism, and Church-officers (since they have no power to constitute a church) not essential to a true church;³ but even the profession of the true faith did not necessarily make one a member of the church, and hence could not be said to be essential to a visible church.⁴ Here, at last, in Hooker the Covenant reigned supreme:

Mutuall covenanting and confoederating of the Saints in the fellowship of the faith according to the order of the Gospel, is that which gives constitution and being to a visible Church.⁵

To have defined the 'marks' of a true visible church was to be in a position to draw a line, and place all the churches of the world in one of two categories (or 'places'), true or false.

¹See ibid., I.xxxiii.18.

²See Jus Divinum, p. 125. They added that visible saints to do the professing, and "obedience to Christ, according to the Gospel," were also necessary, but these things were assumed in Ames.

³See Hooker, Survey, I. pp. 33f, 55ff, 90.

⁴See ibid., I. pp. 60-67.

⁵Ibid., I. p. 46 (all italics). This was not meant to imply the possibility of a true church which would be made up entirely of reprobate heretics; only saints could covenant to form a true church, since it required profession of the true faith with appropriate holiness of life; that is to say, the Covenant was not merely made with one another, but with Christ, in order to constitute a true church. Confederated members were not merely members of one another, but members of Christ, the Head, as well.

One suspects, although it cannot be proved, that many New England divines would cheerfully have drawn the line, and sat confident and alone in the former category. But this could have meant bringing the cry of 'Separatists,' already raised against them in England and Scotland, to such a pitch as might have brought the walls of their refuge about their ears. If there were no other true churches in the world but those formed by 'expresse vocall covenant,' then they had all been baptised, raised, converted, and many had ministered, in false churches; then many of their family and friends were still members of, and Ministers in, false churches. But most important of all, if they drew the dividing line, they would be Separatists; to them (in a way we cannot begin to understand) this would have been intolerable. As Perry Miller has pointed out:

Separatists had flown in the face of the deepest political conviction of the sixteenth century, a conviction that was fortified not only by the prevailing philosophy of social cohesion and subordination, but by centuries of experience. . . . Though they might strain their metaphysics to the breaking point, they were compelled by hook or by crook to reconcile their Congregational dissent with the inviolable preservation of the principle of uniformity.¹

This they could only do "by asserting that the Church of England was a true one, or, to speak more accurately, by asserting that the churches of England were true churches."² Also, there was in New England a new, shaky, and untried oligarchy to be

¹Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts: 1630-1650 (Boston, Mass., 1959), p. 84.

²Ibid., p. 85.

established and maintained; men who had openly repudiated the establishment from which they had come, would have been likely to face more severe dissension from within, and hostility from without, than the young colony could have borne. As it was, they were often troubled by 'Separation'; the threat of it at home, and the accusation of it from abroad.

All these considerations combined to force a compromise: if the Covenant were essential to the very being of a church, some way had to be found to grant that it existed in other churches. This was done by saying that the Covenant need not be vocal and explicit; if the members of a congregation walked orderly in their society, submitting to its Ministry (even if it had been imposed on them from without), obeying its rules, and not forsaking its fellowship, then it was indeed a true church, since it had an implicit covenant.¹ Logic came to their aid: "Implicite and Explicite are but adjuncts, and these separable from the essence. And therefore the essence and being of the covenant may consist with either."²

Having proved, with some of the subtlest casuistry of a casuistical age, that they had not separated from any true churches, they had to establish just what they had done, and why. They granted that any congregation anywhere, even under Rome,

¹See Hooker, Survey, I. p. 47f.

²Ibid., I. p. 48. Cf. Welde, Answer, p. 25: "If wee hold, that to every true Church this explicite Covenant is necessary, for the constituting of it, then we should denie the Churches of En. . . . to bee true Churches: but that is farre from us."

which did not lack saints in an implicit Covenant, was a true church. What the New Englanders had done was to go aside to form pure churches, purged of false matter, offensive ceremonies, and oppressive government.¹

The Conflict over the Catholic Visible Church

In 1647 John Ellis jun., Rector of Waddesdon in Buckinghamshire, blew an alarm. He had discovered Presbyterian troops gathering quietly in a hitherto untroubled corner of the polity battlefield; he feared for Independency, and for Protestantism, if they prevailed there.

The Presbyterian Attack

Ellis first became alarmed when Willem Apollonius, pastor of the church of Middelburg in the Netherlands, published (at the instigation of his Presbytery, the Walcheren Classis), in answer to an appeal from the Westminster Assembly, his Consideratio quarundam controversiarum . . . quae in Angliae regno hodie agitantur.

¹It is obvious, however, that what they had done really was Separation, differing from English Separation only in physical distance and in a form of legality based upon their peripatetic charter and sympathetic magistrate. They were not satisfied with what they called true churches; to have the esse of a church was not enough for the conscience of these men. And although they might say that other churches were true ones, they denied this in practice, by allowing free intercommunion only between themselves and other Independent congregations (that is, the churches they called 'pure'). The true-pure distinction was evolved to soothe New England consciences and to placate Old England tempers; but it was small credit to the English Church when the New Englanders allowed that there were 'true' churches within her; for they said the same of the 'Whore of Babylon.'

The Latin copy (which Ellis read) appeared in 1644, and an English translation followed it in 1645. The bulk of the material was not new, consisting of a brief statement of basic continental Presbyterianism, reinforced by examples. But what alarmed Ellis was one sentence buried in the middle of the third chapter; as he said:

of all men (that I know) of the Presbyterian, and almost of the Protestant judgement, he first layes down this conclusion: "that there is a certain universal outward Church, dispersed through the whole World, described in the Scriptures, which in a certain visible Government doth make one onely Corporation, Ministerial Church-body, or Political society: under which all particular Churches, Classical, Provincial, and National (as it were parts of the whole) are conteyned."¹

Shortly after he read this, Samuel Hudson, minister of Capell in Suffolk, sent him a copy of The Essence and Unitie of the Church Catholike Visible, published in 1645, Hudson's own endeavour at advancing the general visible Church as the first recipient of all Christ's ordinances, and the foundation for the political union of Churches into Classes, Synods, General Assemblies, and even Ecumenical Councils. Ellis then found the idea turning up elsewhere: he discovered it in the Assembly's Draft of Church Government (1645);² in James Noyes' The Temple Measured, sent over by that New England semi-Presbyterian and published in 1646; and in the London Ministers' popular Jus Divinum Regiminis

¹John Ellis, jun., Vindiciae Catholicae (1647), p. 2f., quoting from Apollonius (see his Consideration, the English edition [1645], p. 33); I have substituted quotation marks for italics.

²See Propositions Concerning Church-Government and Ordination of Ministers (Edinburgh, 1647), p. 2.

Ecclesiastici, of the same year.

Ellis was a competent logician, and widely read in the controversies of his age. He recognised (and was almost the first Independent to do so) that this idea was both novel and dangerous to Protestantism, and that if it were to be widely accepted, it would destroy the foundations of Independent church government. He entered the fray in this rather peculiar skirmish in the long battle between the two polities. It seemed vitally important, but only to a few; it called forth three able men, who had not, prior to this controversy, published anything else;¹ it raged around the feet of more seasoned controversialists, who hardly seemed to notice it going on; and it was to this brief encounter that New England contributed the most mature thought of her whole early period, on the subject of polity.

Protestant divines had, in the past, discussed the Catholic Church. But, in opposition to the Papacy, they had argued that the Catholic (or world-wide) Church was invisible, and consisted only of the elect.² The Independents now pointed out what the Presbyterians were forced to admit: that this idea of theirs was entirely new in Protestant circles (apart from the writings of some few Episcopalians). None of the Presbyterians ever bothered

¹Ellis had actually published one sermon, in 1643, and he has several later works as well; Hudson, apart from his two works on this subject, has only one sermon, in 1689; Stone has nothing else.

²See Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 7. But see, for an early form of the other idea, the popular Philip of Mornay ('Mornay du Plessis'), A Treatise of the Chvrch (1581), pp. 23f, 29, 30f, et passim.

to refute this charge, and they certainly would have brought in earlier champions, if there were any to be found. So Ellis's judgment, that the idea of the Catholic Visible Church (as one world-wide political society, and the basis for all Classes and Synods), was first advanced by Apollonius, seems to be correct.

The works involved in this conflict (excepting those which merely mentioned it in passing, and had no influence on the others) were eleven in number.¹ Apollonius' contribution has been noted above. Hudson had also had thoughts along these lines, which he had hesitated to bring forth on account of their novelty; he had, however (in 1644), prepared a paper on the subject for some friends, and encouraged by their insistence, and by reading Apollonius and a few others, he submitted it to the press.² It amounted to only fifty-two pages in quarto, and dealt with two questions: "Whether there be a Church Catholike visible?"³ and "Which of these two Churches is Prima, and which

¹Willem Apollonius, Consideratio (Lat. 1644, Eng. 1645);
Samuel Hudson, The Essence and Unitie (1645);
[London Ministers], Jus Divinum (1646);
James Noyes, The Temple measured (1646);
John Ellis, jun., Vindiciae Catholicae (1647);
John Allin and Thomas Shepard, A Defence of the Answer (1648);
Thomas Hooker, A Survey of the Summe (1648);
John Norton, Responsio ad Totam Quaestionem (1648);
Samuel Hudson, Vindication (1650);
Samuel Stone, A Congregational Church (1652);
Samuel Hudson, An Addition or Postscript to the Vindication
(1658).

²I follow his own account; Hudson, Essence, sig. A2.

³Ibid., p. 11.

is Orta?" (derived).¹ As for the former question, he defended the visibility of the Catholic Church on the basis of a good many Scripture texts,² which will be treated in part when we deal with his Vindication; the single reason which was given was that "if particular Churches be visible, there is a visible Catholike Church" (that is, such as are the parts, so is the whole; if men are visible, so is mankind, and if a particular church is visible, the whole Church must be the same).³ Hudson had to prove there was a Catholic Visible Church if he was to prove that congregations are derived therefrom. The whole of this controversy, in fact, started with the Presbyterian need to find a way out of the dilemma caused by the simple, obvious Independent assertion that in any consideration (Biblical, logical, or temporal), the individual congregation came first. If this were granted, then Ministers would be primarily officers to their own congregations, and their right to do ministerial acts elsewhere would be in jeopardy.

Hudson's major difficulty, however, came not from Independent arguments so much as from his own logical system; like his Independent opponents, Hudson was a Ramist.⁴ If, as he said, the

¹Ibid., p. 24.

²Ibid., pp. 12-19.

³Ibid., p. 20.

⁴This is based on his tacit acceptance of Ramist terms and modes of thought; see, e.g., ibid., pp. 20, 24. His biggest problem was combating the tendency, inherent in Ramism, to say that the whole exists only in its parts.

Catholic Visible Church was an integral (i.e., a whole made up by the joining together of its parts), then he could not avoid the consequence that the whole was derived from its parts, that they were first and it was second. Indeed, in Ramist terms, this conclusion was inescapable; and Hudson did not try to escape it. He admitted that an integral church was simultaneous with its first members; he could only protest that thereafter members were added to the church as a whole which already existed.¹ He could not answer the point that the Catholic Church was made up of the individual churches; he instead introduced a new idea; the particular churches, he said, are made up of members of the Catholic Church.² It was this, almost exclusively, which constituted his proof that the Catholic Church was first (not in time,³ but) in

¹See ibid., p. 41.

²See ibid., p. 41f.

³He at times seemed to regard the Catholic Visible Church as having been first in time (as the Church of which the Apostles were members), and thus the fountainhead of all privileges, and the Church to which all members are added (see ibid., p. 38f). His usual approach, however, was to prove that the Catholic Church was first to the mind: "Whether in our apprehension of Churches we are to begin at the Church Catholike and descend to particular Churches, or begin at the particular Churches and ascend to the Church Catholike." The reason for this was his Ramist bias; the primary question was, "which notion is first in distinct knowledge . . . ?" (ibid., p. 10; italics mine). To find that which came first in distinct knowledge was to find that which was first in the order of nature, and in the mind and intention of God; the three terms were more or less interchangeable.

logical consideration.¹ The following passage could be taken as a summary of his book:

Now then, seeing it is evident by the former Scriptures, and Arguments, that there is a Church Catholike visible: And seeing that the Names, Nature, and Priviledges of the Church, the Promises, and Ordinances of God, the Offices of Christ, and Signes of the true Church, the Members of the Church, and Ministry of the Word, belong first to the Church Catholike visible, and that every particular Christian beare first and last relation thereunto . . . and that particular Churches spring out of the Church Catholike, I therefore conclude . . . That the Church Catholike visible is Prima, and the particular Churches are Ortae.²

The London Ministers, in their Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici (1646), did not bother to defend the Catholic Visible Church from any attackers. They devoted two pages out of two hundred and forty to giving a few texts from Scripture in support of their assertion that "Jesus Christ our Mediatour hath under the New Testament one generall visible Church on earth, made up of all particular Churches."³ They included it merely as a stepping-stone on the way to the next position, that Christ gave government and other ordinances mainly for the edification of this Catholic Visible Church.⁴ It does not appear that they were familiar with Hudson's Essence, and, although they are almost certain to have read Apollonius' Consideratio, they made no reference to it. Their proofs for the Catholic Church were from

¹See ibid., p. 10.

²Ibid., p. 43.

³Jus Divinum, p. 65.

⁴See ibid., p. 67f.

Scripture, not logic.¹

The Temple measured, written by James Noyes (who shared the ministry of the church of Newbury, in New England, with Thomas Parker), was published in London in 1646. His first chapter dealt with "the Vnity of the Church," and on the first page he said,

The Militant Church of Christ upon earth, is one integral Body visible, and hath power to act in Synods and Councils to the end of the world.²

His aim seems to have been to combat the idea of the complete independence of particular churches; he said that "all congregations have a divided power, but not an Independent power."³ He did not set out to be a part of a controversy; he made no reference to any of the books mentioned above (indeed, it is not likely that he had not read them). But, like many Presbyterians (or, more properly, anti-Independents), Noyes felt that the Catholic Visible Church provided a theoretical foundation for closer union among the Congregations of Christ. His four major arguments for the existence of such a Church were: the membership of the Apostles in all their churches; the Scriptural references to the whole Church as though it were one integral body (esp., Matt. 16:18, Eph. 4:4f, 11f, I Cor. 12:28, and Rev. 11:1-3); the visible union of all Christians in one common profession of faith;

¹See ibid., p. 66f.

²Noyes, Temple, p. 1.

³Ibid., p. 5.

and the universal nature of some of the actions which each church performs, such as ordination, censures, and the administration of the Sacraments.¹ On the otherhand, he had to admit: that the Papists also built on this foundation; that "the Church of the Lord Christ, in respect of more ordinary or constant execution, is many Churches"; and that ordinary officers since the Apostles' times all had their relationship to particular congregations.²

The Independent Counter-attack

Ellis (Vincidiae Catholicae, 1647) had, as we have already noted, read all the above books. He summed up the basic question as being briefly:

Whether the whole Catholic Church be one Corporation, whereof the Elders joyntly are Governors; and the members gouerned.³

He explained why this error had arisen: at the root of it was:

Either the not distinguishing the Nature and Essence of the Church (in which respect it hath the names and things they urge, given to it) from the relations of Vniversall and particular; which are notions, and accidentall to it . . . Or 2. Not differencing betwixt the mystical and visible state of it; much being said in the former respect, which they apply to the latter.⁴

As Hudson later pointed out, Ellis was an Aristotelian; for him, the Universal Church had no existence as a thing in itself, but was purely a notion in the mind of man, "collected

¹See ibid., p. 2f.

²Ibid., p. 3f.

³Ellis, Vindiciae, p. 9.

⁴Ibid., p. 60.

from observation of severall particulars, but hath no reall actuall being in time and place."¹ It could be visible only if aggregated,² which it never was or could be; it could not even be politically integrated unless "the union of all parts is obvious and evident to the eye and sence, as the union of the members of the bodie of a man, or members of a society when they are met, and act visibly together."³ Nothing of what the particulars had in common, had an independent existence; their common properties existed only in the individuals themselves.⁴ Their common nature did not make them one united body, any more than the common manhood of all men made them all into one world-wide political state. When one had proved that all churches had certain things in common, one had not thereby laid any foundation for their political union.

Ellis struck at the basis of the whole Presbyterian case by insisting that the common government of churches by Classes and Synods did not require, and could not be supported by, proving that there was such a Catholic Visible Church as he described.

¹Ibid., p. 6.

²See ibid., pp. 23f, 59.

³Ibid., p. 5f; the same case Baynes made against Diocesan 'Churches.'

⁴See ibid., p. 41. Thus an individual church had the nature of a church in itself; the keys and all other privileges were given to "a Church indefinitely and essentially" and so immediately to every single church, as containing that essence (pp. 77, 82); he even referred to all churches as distinct 'species' with the same common nature (pp. 54, 58, 73), which was similar to Thomas Hooker's position (see below).

The idea was not only novel¹ and Romish;² it was unnecessary. When Presbyterians had finished demonstrating that there was indeed such a Church, they still said that individual churches had to consent to common government;³ this showed that Presbyterian government was based, not on the existence of some Prime Universal Church, but, as in Geneva at the first,⁴ on the consent of the congregations to be ruled in common by their Pastors and Elders. The necessity of consent proved that individual congregations existed before any other form of the Church.⁵ To prove that there existed a great integral Church made up of all visible Christians as members, was not to prove that Christian congregations should be ruled in common;⁶ these were two distinct questions.⁷

Whereas James Noyes of Newbury was not aware of the literature involved in this particular conflict, John Allin and Thomas Shepard (Pastors, respectively, at Dedham and Cambridge, New England, and authors of A Defence of the Answer, 1648) knew quite well that the Catholic Visible Church had become a topic of importance to some Presbyterians:

¹See ibid., pp. 10-14.

²See ibid., pp. 25-27, 14-18.

³See The Answer of the Assembly . . . unto . . . the dissenting brethren (1645), p. 48; apud Ellis, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴See ibid., p. 7.

⁵See ibid., p. 65.

⁶See ibid., p. 70.

⁷If the basis were the voluntary association and free consent of the churches, he was even willing to allow a General Council the right of excommunication (except for his fears that it was both risky and groundless); see ibid., p. 74.

it is new to us to read so much of late, of such a Catholick Church, to which administration of Seals, Censures, &c. belong.¹

They cannot have read the London Ministers' Jus Divinum or the Assembly pamphlet; they had probably seen Apollonius' Consideratio and Hudson's Essence.²

In the chapter in which they dealt with the Catholic Church,³ they made two strong criticisms of the Presbyterian position. First, they removed the discussion from the realm of logic (where they confessed to a certain amount of uncertainty) and returned it to the arena of Scripture, where they were quite sure there were no Churches to be found except independent congregations. They said that no matter what one's conception of the Catholic Church might be (they themselves believed it was only invisible, consisting of the elect), one could not deduce therefrom the nature and form of the instituted church. The visible form which the church took, they insisted, depended entirely upon Christ's institution, and not upon any analogy with the mystical Church; in Abraham's time the instituted church was in one family; in Moses' time, in one nation; now in New Testament times it was in one congregation. The first argument of these particular New Englanders was that any form of church not warranted by the New Testament, was not lawful

¹Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 73.

²The former two are excluded by the date of the Preface, Nov. 28, 1645; Norton had a copy of Apollonius at the time; for Hudson's Essence, see the passage about prima and orta, Defence, p. 78.

³See ibid., chap. v, pp. 75-114, of which this paragraph is a summary.

for Christians, no matter what their logic suggested to them. Thus when speaking of Churches "Classicall, Provinciall, Diocesan, Nationall, Patriarchall, &c.," they stated,

we see not how according to the rule of Christ they can be constituted either descendendo, from the common nature of the Catholick Church; or ascendendo, from the combination of particulars, except institution can bee found for the same.¹

They made their other major point by a simile: the fact that all men had a common nature or essence, in no way inferred that they must all submit to one common government under common officers, nor that all mankind, as a totum aggregatum, was the first subject of the power of civil government.² Partly by using this simile, they made the same point which Ellis had made, viz., that to prove there was a Church Catholic Visible was not to prove that all churches may or should be governed in common. They could admit: that there was a Catholic Visible Church, as "a totum visibile, . . . a totum genericum," even "a totum integrale"; that it was prima and particular churches ortae; that keys, officers and ordinances were given first to this Church; and that Christians were first members of this Church (and here they denied that visible ordinances belonged to the invisible Church). But all of this, they said, would still not conclude that this Catholic Church should have a common government.³

¹Ibid., p. 87.

²See ibid., pp. 79-82.

³See ibid., pp. 77-82.

This book ran into difficulty (as did most Independent theory) when discussing the theory and practice of intercommunion. When one church had received a member by Baptism, he was not again to be baptised. Baptism, therefore, must be a sign and seal of entrance into more than one particular church. Allin and Shepard said that Baptism was into the real, mystical, and invisible body of Christ, the number of the elect;¹ but this is impossible, as they admitted that hypocrites and non-elect children were baptised, even in their congregations; therefore, Baptism must be a sign of entrance into the visible church only; and the particular churches must have some unity beside their common relationship to the mystical body of Christ; they must be in some way visibly one. Some kind of Catholic Visible Church, therefore, becomes necessary if we are not to be baptised anew in each congregation we join. There must, in fact, be an actual communion of nature and essence among the churches (the individua which are species of one genus²), which is more than a mere notion in man's mind; it is the only alternative (aside, that is, from a Catholic Visible Church). In fact, an actual communion in nature and essence was on the way. In leaving the logical dispute about the Catholic Church, Allin and Shepard wrote, "this controversie, . . . we hope, will be more fully and purposely disputed by a farre better hand."³

¹See ibid., pp. 97, 144.

²See ibid., p. 80.

³Ibid., p. 94.

And even as they were sending their effort off to Old England, Thomas Hooker was putting the finishing touches on his Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline, some one hundred miles away on the banks of the 'Connecticot' River. It was written primarily as an answer to Samuel Rutherford's The Due right of Presbyteries (1644), and was sent over at the height of the controversy about church government in England, but the boat was lost at sea. It was probably while re-transcribing the work that he was brought a copy of Hudson's Essence, and included a section answering him. The second copy was finished, but not fully corrected and completed, when Hooker was carried off by an epidemic in Hartford (July 7, 1647). The manuscript was sent over, and Thomas Goodwin saw it to the press in England, adding his foreword on April 17, 1648, where he mentioned that it was being released at a time when the polity conflict had abated and the heat of controversy somewhat died down, and the Assembly was to return again to the task of setting out a platform of church government (this time, one not merely agreeable to general rules of Scripture, but proved by specific ones). This was probably the reason why the English Independents chose this time to release several works from New England which they had been holding for some time: Norton's Responsio, Allin and Shepard's Defence, Cotton's The Way . . . Cleared, and, with them, Hooker's Survey.

Hooker provided the solution to the problem of maintaining intercommunion without postulating a Catholic Visible Church. Dealing with the problem of visibility, he answered Hudson by

denying that the visibility of a particular church proved the visibility of its integral, since the parts were not gathered together as one visible aggregate, nor united by virtue of their common laws and government (which cities might have without being visibly united).¹ He echoed older Protestant writers by saying that the Catholic Church was invisible, that is, not apprehensible by sense.² He steered clear, however, of saying that the Catholic Church was the Church of the elect; it was the external, visible Covenant (not the invisible one) which gave a man right to the visible seals.³

The Catholic Church was, rather, the genus, of which the individual congregations were species specialissimae;⁴ it was a Ramist genus, having an actual existence, but in, only in, and not apart from, its particular species;⁵ "all particular Congregations are all the members that a visible Church hath."⁶ It was 'a visible church,' as a genus or totum genericum existens,⁷

¹See Hooker, Survey, I. pp. 264-266.

²He pointed out that the Papists used just this argument, and that the whole idea of a Catholic Visible Church as a totum integrale made up of all its churches, was a Popish tenet; see ibid., I. p. 253.

³See ibid., I. pp. 37-40.

⁴See ibid., I. p. 128.

⁵See ibid., I. pp. 217, 229, 272.

⁶Ibid., I. p. 81; cf. III. p. 19f.

⁷Hudson later admitted that this position was stronger ("fairer") than Ellis's, "for by M. Ellis's reasoning the Church-Catholike should be a Genus drawn by the reason of man, and so existing only in intellectu nostro"; Vindication, p. 106.

to which all ordinances were given, and thence communicated directly to each individual congregation (every species received its essence directly from its genus).¹ By this theory, then, 'a congregation,' or 'a visible church' (the genus-existing-in-its-species) was the first subject of the keys, passing them immediately to its species;² thus, every congregation was, not a similar part of an integral, but a coequal species of one genus. Since "genus est totum partibus essentielle," each and every congregation received the whole nature and all its properties equally, and could act it independently; and since congregations alone were all the species 'a church' had, a Classis was not a species of 'church,' and so could not properly be called 'church.'³ Hence, there could be no members of the Catholic Church outside of local congregations (any more, say, than there could be 'city-dwellers' who did not dwell in some actual city); no one outside one of these congregations could have any right to, or contact with, any of the ordinances, even if he were of the mystical Church by true faith, since the visible ordinances belonged only to the genus-in-its-species, 'a visible church' (the aim of this was to demolish that particular Presbyterian argument for the Catholic Visible Church which was based on the existence of

¹See Hooker, op. cit., I. pp. 257, 275.

²See ibid., I. p. 229.

³See ibid., I. pp. 220-222.

visible Christians who were not in visible churches¹). Inter-communion, however, remained possible, because these congregations shared the same essence and nature, which was not merely a 'notion' in man's mind, abstracted from observation of the particulars, but was the indwelling, common existence and life of the particulars.² Because of this common essence, a member of one congregation might receive the benefits of the ordinances in a congregation other than his own.³ He was a member of 'a visible church'; he shared in the common genus.

Hooker attacked the concept of the Universal Church as a totum integrale primarily because an integral could have functions of its own which the parts did not have; this could lead to a central organisation with its own powers, and eventually to Rome.⁴ He countered that in logic, and hence in the order of nature, integrum est totum, cui partes sunt, essentielles; the parts are the essential causes of an integral, and cause precedes effect, logically speaking. So congregations, being prior to the Integral Church, received nothing from it, neither being, ordinances, officers nor members.⁵ He added that if one regarded the Catholic

¹Since, he said, "it is a fundamentall rule of reason, that the generall nature of any thing hath its existing, and so its working in the particulars," therefore all members of "the visible Church in the generall" had to be in particular congregations; ibid., III. p. 30.

²See ibid., I. p. 219-221.

³See ibid., I. pp. 294-296.

⁴See ibid., I. p. 258f.

⁵See ibid., I. p. 259f.

Church as an integral made up of all individual visible Christians (an important point for Hudson), then it could give no being to particular churches, since it had its own essential causes from its members.¹

But the most effective argument remained that the whole concept bore 'the mark of the Beast';

And in my retired meditations, I could not but observe a secret kind of divine dispensation that the Presbyterian way must need the helpe of a point of Popery, not onely as a pillar, by which it must be under propped, but as a foundation or head corner stone, upon which the whole building must rest and be erected.²

John Norton arrived in Plymouth, New England, in 1635; when he wrote his Responsio to Apollonius' Consideratio, ten years later, he would not seem to have read anything published after he left England, except the Consideratio (which he was asked to answer for Thomas Goodwin and the other Westminster Independents). He was not preoccupied with the subject of the Catholic Visible Church, and only mentioned it in passing, in a few places, and expecially in answer to Apollonius' position on I Corinthians 12:28.³ He knew that the question of a "universal politically visible Church" was a "momentous controversy of this present age"; but he was not sufficiently aware of recent developments to avoid saying that in some ways the particular churches could be viewed

¹See ibid., I. p. 286f.

²Ibid., I. p. 251.

³See Norton, Responsio, pp. 85, 89.

as similar parts of an integral, that is, the Catholic Church.¹ He was on the side of Allin and Shepard, rather than Hooker, in saying that in I Corinthians 12:28, "'the Church' can be expounded of the Catholic, or Mystical Church, militant on earth, and visible in particular Churches."² For Hooker, who saw the pitfalls of this position, it was 'a visible church' as a genus, which was visible in particular churches; if the Norton-Allin-Shepard hypothesis is accepted, only mystical members are visible members; hypocrites are not really members of the visible church, but only apparently (but an apparent member is, by definition, a visible member).

Norton fell headlong here, when he said, "the internal essence, sc. effectual calling, is one, for the Catholic Church and for particular Churches, equivocal members excepted."³ But this is a definition which does not completely define its object; the attempt to see the visible church as simply an incarnation of the mystical body of Christ, the elect, is to provide no foundation in polity for dealing with the church as it actually is, a mixed bag of elect and reprobate. Augustine had said, "there are many

¹See ibid., p. 87.

²Ibid., p. 86. Hudson noted this problem, and saw that Hooker and Ellis avoided it; "Now to make that [viz., the Church as the whole company of the elect] the Genus of the visible, external, political Churches of Christ were as absurd as to make . . . a marble building to be the Genus of all the buildings of other stones, brick and timber. And therefore to dispute from that to this, is not ad idem" (Vindication, p. 108).

³Norton, op. cit., p. 87; cf. "it suffices to material for the particular church that one be apparently a member of the Catholic [i.e., mystical] Church"; ibid., p. 10 (my translation).

sheep without, and wolves within"; this fact haunted Puritans, drove Brownists to schism and some Independents to emigration, confused church polity, and, in spite of rigorous efforts, remained as much a fact of life in New England as in Old.¹

The Final Positions

After Samuel Hudson had read the attacks on his position, both in Ellis' Vindiciae and in Hooker's Survey, he went back and expanded his Essence to five times its original size, publishing it in 1650 as A Vindication of the Essence and Unity. He too was a Ramist; having been defeated by means of his own logical system,² he attempted to redeem the situation by padding out his former outline with analogies and examples; but his renewed case for the primacy of the Catholic Visible Church in relation to particular churches suffered from the encroachments his adversaries had made on his position. He argued, principally: (1) that it

¹It is, one might add, a fact which has always to be recognized in formulating church polity. One can not, like Norton, exclude the reprobate or hypocrite from one's basic theory of the visible church. The essence of the visible church must take account of visible congregations as they actually are. Hooker's was the first Independent book fully so to do; and William Hubbard, in his Narrative, reported that it brought "the Presbyteriall career to a stand" (cited in Joseph B. Felt, The Ecclesiastical History of New England [Boston, Massachusetts, 1855], I, 617).

²He was forced to admit that "Totum essentiale sive genericum . . . giveth the matter or common nature to the species" (Vindication, p. 95); he was not certain that "individua non sunt species" (ibid., p. 106); and he confessed that "The genus giveth essence to the species, and is symbolum causae materialis" (ibid., p. 108).

acted through individual congregations (i.e., that their officers did universal acts in adding members to the Universal Church by Baptism, and in administering the Lord's Supper to members of the Universal Church; and that the officers and members of individual congregations were the instruments through which new members were added to the Universal Church through conversion¹); (2) that it was the first subject of the gifts of officers and ordinances, and the first Church, to which all members were subsequently added (here he seems to be referring to the Jerusalem church as the original integral);² and (3) that the Catholic Church was first in the order of nature, the mind of man, and the intention of God.³ But despite all these arguments, he had to admit that in relation to their combination into Classes and Synods,⁴ and in operation,⁵ particular congregations came first, before the Catholic Visible Church (considered as totum aggregatum or integrale).⁶ This drove him to advance the idea of the Catholic Visible Church as a kind of 'double integral'.

First, however, it was necessary to prove that the Church could be, in any sense, an integral. An integral was defined, in current logic, as that "which is made or constituted per conjunctionem sive appositionem physicam, vel politicam."⁷

¹See ibid., p. 245.

²See ibid., p. 24f.

³See ibid., p. 217f.

⁴See ibid., pp. 25, 52.

⁵See ibid., sig. A3 recto.

⁶See ibid., pp. 216-219.

⁷Ibid., p. 77; cf. pp. 87, 92.

It could not be by physical conjunction (Independents said the whole Church never gathered as one); it must, therefore, be by political combination,¹ but not under a visible (Papal) Monarch.² And here lay the theory's weakness: although all churches were bound up in a "unity of Covenant and Charter," yet this could not bring about their integrality; that could only happen "by political combination which necessarily followeth thereupon. . . . And on this Integral were the privileges of the Church bestowed primarily."³ Thus the individual churches, on the basis of their common charter, combined to form the integral on which the privileges of the Church were bestowed, and from which these privileges flowed down to the individual churches, by reason of their membership in a body which they had formed (alternatively, the privileges were given to the integral before it was formed, when it was yet a 'meer notion'; but a notion could not have accidents or adjuncts). Hudson attempted to solve his dilemma by viewing the Church as a double integral; (1) as made up of all visible Christians (entitive),⁴ and (2) as made up of all visible churches (organical).⁵ It was viewed as an integral of churches to prove (what was the original question) that combination was legal; and as an integral of visible Christians to prove

¹See ibid., p. 112.

²See ibid., p. 119.

³Ibid., p. 92; cf. p. 180f.

⁴See ibid., p. 94; he admitted that this was not a political body; cf. p. 251.

⁵See ibid., pp. 151, 254.

(what the other view could not) the primacy of this Catholic Visible Church in relation to its congregations.¹

But if it were granted that the Catholic Church was an integral, another problem arose: an integral had powers and properties of its own, which its members did not possess;² once again Independents feared a concept which they felt could lead back to Rome, with all of her tyranny over the congregations of Christ. Hudson could reply that an integral made up of similar parts (such as water, or the Church), had no properties which were not in its members by themselves; it had the same powers which they possessed, only in greater measure.³ But it was difficult to explain why Ministers, gathered in Classes and Synods, seemed to have powers which they did not have in their own congregations (especially jurisdiction over those who were not normally in their charge). Hudson answered this with the idea of "habitual power." Officers gathered in judicatories merely exercised, in response to a call, a power which was already seated in their (Catholic) office, but not exercised in the course of ordinary congregational duties.⁴ It was a power which they had

¹See ibid., p. 111.

²See ibid., pp. 82-84.

³See ibid., pp. 93, 125f.

⁴See ibid., pp. 25, 45f, 48.

not in actu, or performance, but in habitu, potentially, or in reserve; a power which had been seated in them by ordination, but which was called forth only on occasion.¹ This habitual power included: the power (together with other Elders) to act authoritatively and judicially in Classes, Synods, etc.;² and the power to do official ministerial acts (preaching, praying, and dispensing the Sacraments) in any congregation which occasionally might call upon a Minister for such acts.³ By this power, Ministers were officers to the whole Church, although directly concerned only with a part of it.⁴

Hudson found these two concepts (of a double integral, and of "habitual power") necessary, to avoid the problems attached to the idea of the Catholic Visible Church as totum integrale, which were: that an integral is derived from, and secondary to, its parts; and that an integral has more powers than its members, even if the members be considered together.

¹Actually, all ministerial power was granted potentially at ordination, but was acted only on call; some of it, at the call of one congregation, the rest, at the call of many.

²See ibid., p. 25; they were not given any power by their congregations; rather their power was called forth by their delegation, and it made their decisions and actions binding on the congregations which had sent them (see ibid., pp. 45f, 186).

³See ibid., pp. 141f, 203.

⁴See ibid., p. 204. The 'habitual-actual' distinction was useful in other areas as well, e.g.: visible Christians who are in no church, have an "habitual" right to Christ's ordinances, and only lack opportunity to receive them (see ibid., pp. 91, 110); all Christians are actually united in common profession, but only habitually in common government (see ibid., p. 151f).

To the standard Independent objection, that the Catholic Church as an Integral cannot be seen, he answered that by "visible" he meant, not that which is seen (i.e., at a glance), but that which can be seen;¹ it referred to the capability of the object,² and was based on the fact that all its members are visible.³ He confessed, however, that the concept was "much denied by many Divines,"⁴ and that the Catholic Church was actually "seen" by an act of the understanding.⁵

In the Vindication, Hudson made two major attacks on the Independent (and especially New England) position, both of them logical: a genus can have neither accidens nor similar species;⁶ and individua non sunt species. In the first place, a genus as such, said Hudson, "can have no officers, seeing it is a second notion abstracted only in the minde: . . . if it hath Officers, it must be considered as an integrum existens."⁷ A genus which (like Hooker's) actually existed,

¹See ibid., p. 5.

²See ibid., p. 107.

³See ibid., pp. 99-101.

⁴Ibid., p. 97.

⁵See ibid., p. 98; a damaging admission, since he had criticised Hooker's 'genus-Church' on the ground that it was only a notion; if the Catholic Church, as an Integral, can only be seen by an act of the understanding (or imagination), then there are grounds for regarding it, too, as a notion.

⁶See ibid., p. 131.

⁷Ibid., p. 40.

it is nothing else (as I conceive) but integrum similare. For genus existeth not as genus, but only under distinct specifical forms, and is abstracted from the species or individuals by the understanding. Now that which hath no existence of its own, can have no existing Officers.¹

This was all by way of demonstrating that the genus 'church' could not have been the 'church' referred to in I Corinthians 12:28, to which officers were given; rather it must have been the Church existing as an integral.² In the second place, Hudson attacked the concept that individual things are species (which implied that their common nature is a genus); "which yet most Logicians do deny."³ It was denied, not so much because of the impropriety of making things which actually exist into parts of a scheme of classification (it was not really so improper as to be out of the question), but because "the formality of a species lieth in dissimilarity and difference from the opposite species."⁴ Normally, every genus contained two contrary species;⁵ only an integrum could have a multitude of similar parts (such as, for example, congregations).⁶

Samuel Stone, Teacher at Hooker's Hartford church, had sailed to New England with him, planning to become his assistant;

¹Idem.

²New Englanders themselves admitted that officers did not belong to the esse of the church, but to its bene-esse; see e.g., Welde, Answer, p. 17; Hooker, Survey, I. p. 11.

³Hudson, op. cit., p. 93; cf. p. 77.

⁴Ibid., p. 125; water, for example, if it were a genus, would have as many species as there were similar drops; see ibid., p. 91.

⁵E.g., the genus Animal contained the species Man and Brute.

⁶See ibid., p. 78.

he was about sixteen years Hooker's junior, having entered Emmanuel College, Cambridge, just two years after Hooker had left his fellowship there. His book, A Congregational Church Is a Catholike Visible Church (1652),¹ followed Hooker's Survey as a defence of his dead friend from Hudson's attack. Its nature and purpose are explained by Samuel Mather's assertion, in his Epistle to the Reader, that one cannot understand this whole debate, or Hooker's position in it, unless one is familiar with logic.² Stone set out to explain the basic principles of (Ramist) logic which were relevant to the debate, and then, by way of confuting Hudson, he applied them to the problem of the Catholic Visible Church.³

In this logic, individuals were species.⁴ Ordinarily, the two species of the genus Animal would be Man and Brute; they would be the species specialissimae or infimae, which have no lower species, but simply predicate something of two groups of individuals.

¹The title gives the modern reader little hint of the contents.

²Stone, A Congregational Church, sig. A2.

³The book is really an expansion and codification of Ames on the subject; the relevant passage should be quoted: "That visibility, which is in distinct companies or congregations, doth not only make a visible Church, but touching the outward forme doth make so many visible Churches as there are distinct congregations. . . . For those congregations are as it were similiary parts of the catholick Church, and so doe partake both of the name and nature of it. Therefore a particular Church in respect of that common nature which is found in all particular Churches, is a Species of the Church in generall, but in respect of the catholick Church which hath the respect of an whole, it is a member compounded of divers severall members gathered together, and so in respect of those members it is also an whole." Marrow, I.xxxii.3-5.

⁴See Stone, op. cit., pp. 25-33.

To the Nominalist, the species was only an idea, to the Realist it actually existed; but to the New England Puritan Ramist, neither alternative was satisfactory, since in neither did they find the relationship between the order of nature, the mind of God, and their arts curriculum, which was needed at the time.¹ They simply claimed, individua sunt species; the lowest species was not homo, but Socrates, or Plato, or Guilielmus.² Man, and every other created thing, and every society, and every art, was tied firmly to God (the First Being) by being one of the bottom stones in a massive pyramid which ascended, step by step (and the steps corresponded in order to the organisation of the New England arts curriculum) to the cap stone, which (to invert an image) supported the whole. Every species received its essence from its genus, which contained the material and formal causes of the species.³

¹The order of things in nature, the mind of God, and the mind of a properly-educated man, was the same: "Definition . . . is not a meer notion, crept into the understanding of man, before it was duely entred and enrolled into the Artificial Fabrick of Reason, which is one of those Vestigia and Impressions which the first Being hath left behind him" (ibid., p. 12; cf. p. 25).

²Socrates and Plato are said to be two different species because they "differ in their essentiall forme one from another" (ibid., p. 28; cf. pp. 7, 26).

³"Genus gives and communicates being to other things, i.e. to his species: for genus est totum partibus essentielle, the essential causes, which constitute the essence, are comprehended in the genus, and the forme. Homo est animal rationale: Animal, a living creature is essentiall to man: It containes part of the essence of man. For the definition layeth out all the essentiall causes" (ibid., p. 5, cf. p. 18). In this, genus is "opposed to Integrum, for there the parts did give essence, matter and form to the Integrum" (ibid., p. 3).

Therefore, the lowest genus was 'a congregational church,' and its species were the church at Boston, the church at Capell, etc.¹

It was this genus, 'a congregational church,' which was the Catholic Visible Church.² It was visible because it actually existed in (and only in) the churches themselves.³ It was in them, conveying to them their essential causes, matter (visible saints) and form (a Covenant, explicit or implicit). It received its being from God, through the long chain of genus and species, and conveyed it to the individual churches which were its species. Before the species existed, the genus (found only in the species) did not exist either; when the species cease, the genus shall cease also; they are simul natura.⁴ Since the genus was visible (because it actually existed in each congregation), it could also be said to be Catholic (because it was to be found all over the world⁵. Of course, each church was integrum as well as

¹See ibid., sig. A2 verso.

²"A congregational church is a catholic generical church, the genus of all churches in the world. . . . and the several churches and individual congregations . . . are the species of church in genere" (ibid., p. 40).

³A "genus is not . . . a meer notion floting only in the brain . . . but a real thing." It may be "invented" ('come upon'), hence it exists in rerum natura; that it may be abstracted from things proves it is really in them (ibid., p. 16f). "Our understanding doth not give being to genus, but it is extant, and in print in rerum natura, whether we observe it or not" (ibid., p. 2).

⁴"The duration of the whole kind is equal with the duration of the individuals" (ibid., p. 15).

⁵See ibid., p. 40.

species;¹ but the genus Church was not, and could not be, an integrum. An integrum was composed of, and hence caused by, its members.² A genus, on the other hand, was the cause of its members, or species, in the logical sense.³

All of this discussion was aimed primarily at proving that this genus-church was capable of having accidents, or adjuncts, and hence capable of having officers.⁴ Hudson had said that a genus could have no officers, and hence could not be the 'church' referred to in I Corinthians 12:28; not only did the essence of a church not include them, but also, since a genus was a mere notion abstracted from reality, it could not have actual concrete officers, such as Apostles and prophets, set in it. Stone was trying to prepare a genus which would be capable of adjuncts (size, number, etc.), and hence capable of receiving and containing officers within itself, and thus being the 'church' referred to in the above text. The closest he could come, within the limitations of his own logical system, was the genus described above: it contained officers (not actually in itself, but) by containing each congregation (or rather, grasping it by its common nature⁵). It thus contained the actual officers which were within those

¹"An individual church is a species, as it respects a church in general, under which it is comprehended; yet as it containeth members, it is an integral" (ibid., p. 33).

²"The members give essence to the whole, that is, matter and form" (ibid., p. 25). But if an individual church be considered, as he says it may, as an integral, then its members must give it its essence; see p. 3.

³See idem.

⁴See ibid., p. 35.

⁵See ibid., p. 38.

congregations.¹

What Stone had done was to take the Church as a universal integral, change a few details, and call it a genus: as a totum genericum existens,² it existed in nature, had parts, was capable of adjuncts and accidens,³ could admit and exclude members, had officers,⁴ and had its own proper acts.⁵ Although this might be called a genus, it was clearly a totum integrale in generic disguise.⁶ This hybrid logic illustrates the Independents' need to do two things: to advance such a concept of the Church as would make it impossible to apply the word to a Classis, Synod, General Assembly, or General Council; and yet to have it be such a Church as Christ could set officers in, so that they would belong only to individual congregations.⁷ Although this New England genus-church could fulfil the first need (if 'a congregational

¹See ibid., p. 33.

²That is, a universal existing whole. This is in response to Hudson's challenge (Vindication, pp. 76-79); see Stone, op. cit., p. 34.

³See ibid., pp. 21, 35.

⁴See ibid., p. 36, where he also rejected the idea of habitual power in officers, saying that what may be, is not.

⁵That is, the acts were its own because they were done by its species; it had no acts which were done by itself and not by the species.

⁶See ibid., chap. iii, passim, esp., pp. 7-25; it is almost impossible, under this system, to distinguish between a genus and an integrum: both are wholes, immutable (in their rules), and having parts; both are "abstract second notions"; parts and whole have the same extent in both; and, most important, "Genus and Integrum are both existing, and measurable by time and space" (ibid., p. II); an extremely revealing statement.

⁷See ibid., p. 43.

church' is the only kind, or genus, of 'church,' then no other body can be called a 'church,' or receive church-power), it failed in the second. A genus contained only essential causes; it could not contain officers, since the New Englanders agreed that officers were not essential to the church. The church as totum essentiale came before its officers; and Stone himself, after having set out all his logical concepts in careful order, was forced to admit in the end, that a genus could not be said to have officers.¹

The last stroke in the fight over the Catholic Visible Church belonged to Samuel Hudson. A second edition of his Vindication was sent to the press in 1658 without his knowledge; having no time to revise, he added a fifty-two page section, An Addition or Postscript to the Vindication. His main interest was to reply to Stone;² and he noted immediately that

M. Stone did implicitly grant what I contend for, which was, that the universal Church is not the genus of particular Congregations, in that he assigneth another genus to them in the frontispice [sic] of his book . . . and that is Congregation in genere.³

Stone, he said, did not deal with the Universal Church, considered as the whole body of visible believers now alive on the face of the earth, or as an integral composed of all congregations. It was certainly true that every congregation was an individual in

¹See ibid., p. 83.

²Although he did include a few remarks on the reply to the Jus Divinum by the Ministers of Norfolk and Suffolk, and on John Collings' Vindiciae Ministerii.

³Hudson, An Addition, p. 3.

the species (not genus) 'a congregational church'; but it was also to be considered as a member of the Universal Church, which was an integral, bound into one body by a common confession of faith and a common Baptism.¹

Hudson pointed out that Ellis was an Aristotelian, and that in answering him in Aristotelian terms, he ran afoul of Stone's Ramism. He and Ellis were both speaking of a genus as a "logical second notion abstracted by the minde,"² not, like Stone, of a genus which actually existed in each of its parts.³ He claimed that Stone had been unable to prove that a genus (even one such as he and Hooker were defending) actually existed anywhere except in the understanding.⁴ In fact, he said, Stone had been misled by Ramus into describing an integrum instead of a genus; it was not the nature of a thing in genere which gave essence to individuals, but

the entire Integral existing nature, comprehended under these kindes gives essence to the individuals . . . And therefore either Ramus hath not given us a right definition of genus (as some better Logicians than I conceive) or else he giveth a definition only of an existing integral nature of a genus, which is onely an Integral of or under such a genus, and so hath passed by the topick of a thing in genere, or general consideration in abstracto.⁵

¹See ibid., pp. 17, 49f.

²Ibid., p. 17.

³If the genus existed only in its species, it still had no integral existence except by mental abstraction; each particle of the genus gave essence only to the single species in which it existed; see ibid., p. 12f.

⁴"Yea, put all the wood in the world together, and you may make a great heap and integral of them, but you cannot make wood in genere, but by mental abstraction . . . Genus is another thing then all the individuals gathered together. Genus is not by conjunction, apposition, or aggregation, but by abstraction" (ibid., p. 14f).

⁵Ibid., p. 32.

Stone had admitted this, he said, when he had confessed that the Church had members, not as it was a genus, but as it was considered as an integrum.¹ We have noted how Stone regarded the idea of 'a congregational church' as though it were also a kind of box which actually contained all the world's congregational churches within itself. Hudson was also a Ramist, but he did not go as far as the New Englander; he maintained that neither an individual thing nor a totum integrale could be a species, since species could only be "abstract natures which have some universality in them."² He used against Stone the Ramist proposition that every genus had two contrary natures, or species in it; this, he said, proved that individuals could not be species, since in any one category there were more than two of them, and they all had the same nature.³ The church at Boston, or Capell, or Middleburgh, was not a species of the genus 'a congregational church,' but, since each had the same general nature as the other, they were all members (or individuals) in one great integral, the Catholic Visible Church.

As we have seen, Hudson's integrum-Church came under two considerations: primarily, as it was an integral composed of all visible believers; and secondarily, as an integral of the churches into which the believers gathered.⁴ This meant that there might

¹See ibid., p. 32f.

²Ibid., p. 20. By Stone's logic, said Hudson, "every man shall be an individual particular general Catholick man" (idem).

³See ibid., p. 22f.

⁴Only the latter integral could be called the Body of Christ; he could not have more than one Body. See ibid., pp. 35, 51.

still be members of the Church who were not members of a church (i.e., of a congregation). They were made members of this Church by Baptism,¹ and thereafter might be admitted to the congregation of the place in which they lived. But one major problem this left unsolved for the Presbyterians was, if it were membership in the Catholic Visible Church which entitled one to all the ordinances of Christ, how was one capable of Baptism before one was actually a member? They had not yet agreed whether it was Baptism or profession of faith in Christ that constituted one a member of the Universal Visible Church.²

One other question remained, aggravated by the concept of the 'double integral': in which integral did Christ set his officers (I Cor. 12:28)? If in the Church considered as an integral of all visible believers, then any officer had authority over any Christian at any time, and the Church was one great congregation ruled in common by its officers; "and the Papists will thank them for this." But if they were set in the Church as an integral of all visible congregations, then those outside such a congregation had no relationship to any officer, and no right to the ordinances of Christ until they became members of a congregation; and this was precisely the Independents' point.

¹See ibid., p. 4.

²See ibid., pp. 50, 39; cf. Hudson, Vindication, p. 223.

III. THE CHURCH (2) The Issues

Church-Communion we hold (with Church-admitting to fellowship of the Seales) the knowne, approved, and orderly recommended member of any true Church . . .

--Church-Government &c., II. p. 62

The abstract, logical debate about the Church was intertwined with important Scriptural and practical issues. It is to several of these issues that we now turn our attention.

The Catholic Visible Church in the New Testament

Logic might direct the course of this debate; but Scripture had to settle it. In a sentence, Richard Mather summed up the challenge of Independents to Presbyterians: "we know no such Church in the New Testament, as a visible Catholick Church, wherein the seales are to be dispensed."¹ When they saw the word 'church' on the pages of the New Testament, they saw a body either mystical or congregational; never presbyterial.² Faced with the difficulty of proving the existence of presbyterial Churches in the New Testament, some Presbyterians had turned to the idea that the word 'church' was sometimes used there to refer to a great

¹Church-Government &c., II. p. 66.

²See above, pp. 54-56.

visible Integral, "for which Christ hath provided a visible Polity, a visible Government, by visible Officers and Ordinances for the good both of the visible and invisible members thereof."¹

Apollonius had put it quite clearly:

We affirme that there is described in Scripture an universall externall Church, dispersed through the whole world, which in a visible polity maketh one Ecclesiasticall organically body, under which are contained all Particular, Classicall, Provinciall, and Nationall Churches, as parts of that whole.²

Many texts were used to prove the point; but as Allin and Shepard pointed out,³ the two most popular with Presbyterians were both in the twelfth chapter of I Corinthians.

The first was verse thirteen:

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit;

but the question was, into what body are we all baptized?

Presbyterians answered that the context made it obvious "that the place is meant of an organical body as one,"⁴ of which all visible Christians were members by baptism; "And some were baptised into the generall body, that thereby were not admitted into any particular Church, as the Eunuch"⁵ and others, which

¹Jus Divinum, p. 38.

²Apollonius, Consideration, p. 33; cf. Ellis' translation of this sentence, above p. 64.

³See Allin and Shepard, Defence, pp. 95-99.

⁴Hudson, Vindication, p. 132f; cf. Jus Divinum, p. 66f.

⁵Ibid., p. 68; the text for the Eunuch was Acts 8:38; the examples of Lydia (Acts 16:15) and the Philippian gaoler (Acts 16:33) were also adduced to prove this point.

"is a Rule for us what to doe in like cases upon the same common ground."¹ The usual Independent response to this argument was to attempt to prove that each of these extraordinary cases had actually been a member of some congregation before Baptism; the alternatives to this were either to say that they "were admitted by baptisme immediately and directly into Christ and his mysticall body,"² or that these Baptisms were simply extraordinary acts done by extraordinary officers.

The other, and by far the most popular text used to prove that there was a Catholic Visible Church spoken of in the New Testament, was verse twenty-eight of I Corinthians:

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

The plain and clear sense of the Word seemed to be that Jesus Christ had one Church on earth, to which he had given (among other gifts) all church officers, both ordinary and extraordinary, universal and particular.³ This text, said the Presbyterians, proved both that there was a Catholic Visible Church, and that it was primarily to this Church that all officers were given; not to a particular church, since Apostles, Prophets and Evangelists were included in the list. All sides agreed that these three had

¹Ibid., p. 21.

²Ellis, Vindiciae, p. 70. "Baptism admitteth us into the whole mysticall body of Christ, whether visible or invisible" (Allin and Shepard, op. cit., p. 100).

³See Jus Divinum, p. 65.

been universal officers; the Presbyterians asserted that they had therefore been set in the Universal Church. They concluded that since the regular officers were included in this same list, they must have been granted to this same Church.¹ If the Church in I Corinthians 12:28 was not the Catholic Visible Church, it was up to the Independents to say what it was.

John Norton, following Ames and the older English Protestant divines,² said that the 'church' in this text "can be expounded of the church Catholic, or Mystical, militant on earth, and visible in the particular Churches: in which Catholic or Mystical Church they may rightly and properly be said to be set, who are set in particular Churches."³ So this text did not refer to the Catholic Church as politically visible, but to a particular church and/or the Catholic or Mystical Church. It was to this Catholic Church that the officers named were given, although set in congregations for the exercise of their gifts; to this Church of the elect were the keys given, although exercised in instituted congregations; the relationship between the Catholic Church and the particular churches was in their common members, the elect, for whose sake only all these things were given.⁴ The theory was open to serious objections, which are noted elsewhere.⁵ Allin and

¹See Hudson, Essence, pp. 13, 28, 32.

²See Ames, Marrow, I.xxxi. (esp. 19, 25).

³Norton, Responsio, p. 86 (translation mine).

⁴See ibid., p. 86f.

⁵See above, p. 82f.

Shepard followed the same line as Norton.¹

Ellis represented a position somewhere between the two main New England theories (i.e., Norton's, noted above, and Hooker's, which follows). He said, "this Scripture, and other like, spak [sic] of the Church as of one in mysterie, in nature, and in essence"² (although this did not imply that it was one visible single body). He sometimes interpreted this text as though it referred to the mystical Church,³ but he also said that in Scripture, the word meant either the mystical or essential Church,⁴ and he sometimes seemed to favor the latter interpretation.⁵ He stated both that all gifts were "given immediately to every particular Church, where they are,"⁶ and that they were given to the church "as one Essentiall or Mysticall body."⁷

Hooker would seem to have shared in Ellis's confusion, when he stated, of this text and others, that

they are to be understood of every particular, or (which is all one, and my meaning) of the Church as a Totum universale existing and determined in its actings by the particulars, or if you will, the Apostle points at one particular, but includes all particulars by a parity and proportion of reason. As God set in the Church of Corinth, and so in all Ghurches [sic] Apostles and Teachers.⁸

¹See Allin and Shepard, op. cit., p. 98; there is a disparity here, in that, while Baptism admits to the mystical body of Christ, excommunication only excludes from the local church; see ibid., p. 101f.

²Ellis, op. cit., p. 34.

³See ibid., p. 36.

⁴See ibid., p. 43.

⁵See ibid., pp. 42, 79.

⁶Ibid., p. 80.

⁷Idem.

⁸Hooker, Survey, I. p. 271f; cf. p. 247f.

The seeming confusion is deceptive; in Hooker, the interpretation of this passage as though it referred to the mystical Church is gone; there is no dependence on the idea that one congregation is here spoken of; the genus, moreover, is not a predicate describing a community of nature, but that community of nature itself, actually existing in each individual.¹ He added that the fact that the Apostles had wielded power unlimited in its extent was not at all due to the existence of some Catholic Visible Church, nor was it proof thereof; it came solely from God's extraordinary commission to them. Everything, in fact, depended on God's institution; and God had confined the authority of ordinary officers within the limits of a single congregation, no matter how wide the mandate given to Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists.² As Allin and Shepard said, even if "all the visible beleivers and churches of the world, are as one body to him [Christ], he governing, protecting, instructing all as his visible body,"³ yet "in the n.T. there is no instituted Catholick, Nationall, or Provinciall Church; but onely the Church of a particular Congregation."⁴ The Apostles' universal jurisdiction, moreover, could not make all churches politically one body, for "it will not be found that ever there was any politicall Society,

¹For a more complete description of Hooker's position, see above, pp. 77-81.

²See ibid., I. pp. 249, 272f.

³Allin and Shepard, op. cit., p. 72.

⁴Ibid., p. 73.

without actual combination."¹

Samuel Hudson went down the list of Independent interpretations of the word 'church' in this text. It could not, of course, be the Church Triumphant, for that had "no officers but Christ the head."² Nor could the invisible Church of the elect, as such, have any officers; "they are indeed given for the good of the Elect, yet they are set in the visible Church."³ It was not the Church Entitive, since that was a homogeneous body, with every member equal; officers were not essential to the Church.⁴ It was not a particular congregation, since the Apostles were set over all the churches in the world, considered as one body.⁵ It was not Hooker's totum universale, "for genus qua genus can have no officers, seeing it is a second notion abstracted only in the minde: . . . if it hath Officers it must be considered as an integrum existens."⁶ This totum genericum existens of Hooker's "is nothing else (as I conceive) but integrum similare,"⁷ which

¹Ibid., p. 98. Perhaps, after all, this was the most important point to be made about the Presbyterian system; no matter how one might consider the Catholic Church, Presbyterianism was based on voluntary political combination by already-existing congregational churches.

²Hudson, Vindication, p. 39; cf. p. 43.

³Idem.

⁴See ibid., pp. 39f, 44.

⁵See ibid., p. 40.

⁶Idem.

⁷Idem.

alone exists and may have adjuncts. The Apostle was not pointing at one particular Congregation (of Corinth), and thus including all by parity of reason, for "ordinarily, one Congregation hath, not teachers, but only one teacher: therefore this parity of reason cannot hold."¹ As for Ellis, "his granting of a mystical oneness in Essence, drives him to 'grant willingly, that this doth imply an union visible also, as much as may stand with the institution of Christ, and the edification of the Church,' p. 34. And I think the Presbyterians desire no more."²

If all of these positions failed, then the Church Catholic Visible must be meant in I Corinthians 12:28: an organical body consisting of all the visible saints in the world, over whom officers are set, normally acting their power distributively in their several congregations, but having an 'habitual' right to exercise it anywhere in the world if they have a call thereto, or over any Christian in their jurisdiction.

The Catholic Visible Church:
Advantages and Objections

Rarely do men engage in long debates for purely abstract concepts; most often they defend an idea because it undergirds something which they value, and they attack another because it threatens something they cherish. It was so in the case of the idea of the Catholic Visible Church; we shall not have fully

¹Ibid., p. 41.

²Ibid., p. 42; italics omitted.

understood the reasons for the long, abstruse and technical works published on the subject until we have looked at some of the treasured truths whose fortunes were linked with those of this idea.

Prior to this time, as Independents asserted, most Protestant divines had contended against the idea of one Universal Visible Church, considered as a political or organical body; it was a Romish concept. The Catholic Church was invisible, and was composed of all the elect;¹ "the total militant church exists as a *νοητὸν* or thought, but not in actuality."²

The Presbyterians who put forward and defended the concept were inadvertently demonstrating how much the Independent position had undermined their own; it had not previously been thought necessary to spend so much time and energy expounding the philosophical basis for the common government of congregations by consistories of their officers. But the foundation for that common government, as well as for ministerial administrations in, or to members of, other congregations, was threatened by the growing influence of the Independent assertion that officers of one congregation had no authority over members of another. To

¹See Calvin, Institutes, IV.i.2, 3; cf. Ames, Marrow, I.xxxi.19, I.xxxix.20.

²Parker, De Politeia Ecclesiastica, III.xviii.1, apud Norton, Responsio, p. 60: "Ecclesiam totam militantem nihil esse per se subsistens, sed aliquid *νοητὸν*." See also Ames, Marrow, I.xxxii.1.

combat this assertion, some Presbyterians systematised and advanced what they believed was a New Testament idea: the Catholic Visible Church, to which all Christians and church officers had their primary relationship.¹ They used the concept to defend the ideas of the 'unchurched' visible Christian, the intercommunion of the Ministry, and consociational church government. Independents (and especially New Englanders) attacked it on the grounds that it was Popish and novel, that the Catholic Church (if it were visible) was not an integral, and that the congregation was the source of all church authority.

The Presbyterian Arguments

A position which the Presbyterians spent a good deal of time maintaining was that one could be a member of the Universal Church (visible, not invisible) without belonging to a particular flock. The reasons were both practical and theoretical: practically, it was a rationale for the practice of Continental Reformed Churches in baptising the children of parents who were not church members (if the children were already members of the Catholic Visible Church because of their parents' profession, then they were entitled to Baptism);² the theoretical reason was,

¹In most ages of the Church's life, this idea has been more or less tacitly accepted; but when pressed, Presbyterians found that it was extremely difficult to maintain on Protestant principles.

²See Apollonius, Consideration, pp. 84-89, and esp. p. 85f. Most New Englanders did not dream that this same problem was soon to embroil their own churches.

that if one could not be a member of the Catholic Visible Church without first becoming a member of a congregation, then one's membership in the congregation was primary, and the Catholic Church was, as the Independents claimed, somehow derived from and secondary to the particular churches.¹ The Presbyterians had then to decide what 'marks' distinguished an unchurched visible Christian. Apollonius, as a Minister in a National Church which was directly concerned with the problem, required attendance at worship and some knowledge of orthodox doctrine; a blameless life was not necessary.² The London Ministers said profession of the Christian faith was enough;³ John Ball wanted "righteousness, holiness, love" in addition.⁴ Was Baptism a sign of a Universal Visible Christian? Hudson was not certain,⁵ but seemed to think that Baptism came after membership, and that "what it is that is sufficient to make a man a member of the Church Catholike visible" was "beliefe of the maine points of the Christian faith, & professed subjection thereunto"⁶ (which was all that had been

¹See Ball, Tryall, p. 49; Jus Divinum, p. 111. There was some confusion here: some Presbyterians held that membership in the Catholic Visible Church entitled one to Baptism; others, that it was Baptism which made one a member of this Church (see just below).

²See Apollonius, op. cit., p. 85f.

³See Jus Divinum, p. 111.

⁴Ball, Tryall, p. 60; cf. p. 48.

⁵See Hudson, Essence, p. 35f.

⁶Ibid., p. 39f.

required of the Eunuch, Lydia, and the others). And just as membership was primarily in the Universal Visible Church, so by excommunication a man "is bound all the world over, and shut out from the brotherly communion of the Church universall."¹

The concept of the Catholic Visible Church was used as a rationale to explain how it was possible for the Minister of one congregation to exercise his authority beyond the limits of his flock; but the actual practice of intercommunion was also used to prove the existence of this Church, in which all Christians were members, and over them were all church officers.² Here Presbyterians believed they had a telling point; for none of the Independents dared advocate rebaptism, and many of them took communion in congregations other than their own.³ This was impossible, said Presbyterians, unless "every Minister be a generall officer, and a Minister of the Church Catholike";⁴ "if particular Churches have communion together it must of necessity be, that they bee parts and members of the whole body which is one."⁵

Finally, and most important, many Presbyterians deduced from the existence of the Catholic Visible Church, the validity of Synods, Councils,⁶ and National Churches.⁷ Others, however,

¹Apollonius, op. cit., p. 23; cf. Hudson, op. cit., p. 18.

²See Hudson, Vindication, pp. 135-137.

³See Hudson, Essence, p. 33; Apollonius, op. cit., pp. 71-75.

⁴Hudson, loc. cit.

⁵Ball, op. cit., p. 23; cf. ibid., p. 88 (misnumbered 80).

⁶See Noyes, Temple, p. 54; Jus Divinum, p. 218f.

⁷See Hollingworth, Certain Queres, ca. p. 10.

such as Apollonius, while holding that there was indeed a Catholic Visible Church, did not seem to find therein any real basis for the actual consociated government of the churches. For them, communion in excommunication, ordination, and the Ministry; government and other ordinances; and even the degree of 'visibility', all seemed to depend more upon an actual political union in Classes, Synods, and National Assemblies, than on the theoretical unity of the Catholic Visible Church.¹ And in actuality, the largest Church that could be politically united was the National.² It thus appears that although the Presbyterians' Universal Church was supposed to be one in government, this unity was only 'notional'; actual unity depended, not on this Catholic Church, but on the magistrate's ability to enforce one form of Church Government within one land.

The Independent Objections

When we consider the basic ingredients of the Independents' reaction to the challenge of a Universal Visible Church, one factor on which they were nearly all agreed was that this was a Popish tenet, and could lead straight back to Rome. John Ellis quoted Cardinal Bellarmine's definition of the Catholic Visible Church, and invited his readers to compare it to the Presbyterians':

¹See Apollonius, op. cit., pp. 29, 90f, 105f, 115, 128f. Hooker summarised and confuted this position; see his Survey, I.p. 94f, et seqq.

²See Hudson, op. cit., p. 6 (misnumbered 2).

one visible Church, or Congregation of men bound together by the profession of the same faith, and participation of the same sacraments, under the government of lawfull Pastors, and especially, of that onely Vicar of Christ on earth, the Pontiffe or Bishop of Rome.¹

Independents also said the whole idea was a rank novelty in Protestant divinity. Presbyterians found both these charges very difficult to answer.²

Bartlet, an English Independent, did not contest that there was "a universall Visible Church militant on earth,"³ but denied that it was political. But the New Englanders almost unanimously rejected the visibility of the Catholic Church; some saying that the Universal Church was only invisible,⁴ others that 'visible' meant only that which could be seen with the eyes (the local congregation) or, at most, that which was politically integrated (of which they denied the lawfulness); but all agreed, with Bartlet, that a Universal Church in which visible ordinances could be administered was a figment of the imagination.⁵

¹Ellis, Vindication, p. 17; cf. ibid., p. 3; Bartlet, Model, p. 50f; Hooker, Survey, I. p. 254f.

²See Hudson, Vindication, sig. A2 verso et seq.

³Bartlet, op. cit., p. 50.

⁴See Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 5.

⁵See Church-Government &c., I. p. 39. Hooker, op. cit., I. pp. 3, 63, 254f; John Davenport and William Hooke, A Catechisme &c. (1659), p. 27f (esp. Q.103); Welde, Answer, pp. 14, 17; Cotton, Way, p. 10; Ellis, Vindiciae, p. 6.

The Independent position developed from Ames, who saw the Catholic (invisible) Church as "something integrally universall,"¹ through the idea that universality lay in "that common nature in which particular things agree,"² to the ultimate position, in Hooker, and Stone that the universality of the genus was not just an idea, but an existing reality.³

Finally, Independents insisted that the Catholic Church as a visible integral, even if it existed, could not be primary: not as it was made up of all visible Christians, since it was impossible to be a visible Christian unless one was a member of a visible congregation;⁴ and not as it was made up of all congregations, since if Classes, Synods, and National Churches were simply integra, then all their authority in jurisdiction and ordination was given them by their congregations.⁵

The Problem of Intercommunion

Despite the wide learning displayed in this skirmish over the Catholic Church, the most basic issue was quite practical, almost simple: the problem of intercommunion. Intercommunion

¹Ames, Marrow, I.xxxi.19.

²Ellis, loc. cit.; Bartlet, op. cit., p. 35.

³See Miller, New England Mind, p. 147.

⁴See Hooker, op. cit., I. p. 62f; Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 29 (Q.107).

⁵See Hooker, op. cit., I. p. 128. A great deal of the difficulties encountered by both sides sprang from the configurations of contemporary logic; neither Hudson's integral nor Hooker's genus were adequate to 'contain' Christ's Church.

amongst Independents was a fact which both pleased and angered Presbyterians.

Intercommunion in Seals and Censures

It pleased them because they saw that it was a reality among congregational churches, both in England¹ and in New England;² and this placed in their hands a powerful weapon for proving the existence of a Catholic Visible Church. Hudson, in fact, bluntly asserted that there could be no other possible justification for any kind of intercommunion, in Word, prayer, Sacraments, or anything else,³ unless there were a Church of which all visible Christians were members, and in which all officers had official standing.⁴

But the fact of intercommunion, especially among the New England churches, angered English Presbyterians as well as pleasing them. For these New Englanders (whose most reiterated protestation was that they were not Separatists, and that they

¹See Hudson, Essence, p. 27.

²See idem; Church-Government &c., I. p. 29, II. pp. 62, 78; Hudson, Vindication, p. 72; Cotton, Keyes, p. 17: "for wee receive the Lords Supper, not only as a Seal of our communion with the Lord Jesus, and with his members in our own Church, but also in all the churches of the Saints."

³He rejected with scorn the idea "that this communion of strangers with them is by vertue of a particular, present, transient membership with them;" op. cit., p. 72f; cf. William Rathband, A Briefe Narration (1644), p. 10.

⁴See Hudson, op. cit., pp. 135f, 141; Hudson, Essence, p. 26f; Cawdrey, Vindiciae, p. 39f; cf. Hollingworth, Certain Queres, p. 26.

regarded the English parish churches as true ones¹) denied intercommunion to members of the English parish churches, even to those who came by orderly recommendation.² Said John Ball angrily,

we desire to know upon what grounds from God you can deny them, if you acknowledge our Churches, Ministry, and Sacraments, to be true and of God (as you professe) and the members of the Church be known and approved, orderly recommended unto you.

.
You professe high respect of your brethren in old England, but it seemes you judge them insufficient to give orderly testimonie of the sinceritie and uprightness of approved Christians, well known unto them, and living among them, which two cannot well agree.³

And William Rathband protested that in permitting intercommunion among their own churches, and yet refusing to admit members from 'corrupt' churches (that is, in fact, those which differed from them in government and discipline), they effectively denied the English churches and Ministers to be true churches and Ministers;⁴ to the English, this looked very like Separation.

This was the guilty secret in New England; they were, in fact, Separatists, in civil as well as religious affairs, but this was a truth they disguised from themselves and hid from others.⁵

¹See Church-Government &c., II. p. 41; Cotton, Way Cleared, I. pp. 9, 10f, 14.

²It seems undeniable that the Sacraments were denied to members of English parish churches, even if they came with letters: "they deny the communion to some members of our Churches that go over with certificates (though not to members of their own Churches) because they judge us impure" (Hudson, Vindication, p. 136).

³Ball, Tryall, pp. 25, 51.

⁴See Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 37f.

⁵See Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, pp. 150-152.

The deception may be seen in an answer of Allin and Shepard:

if any will hold to their membership in England, and come orderly to communion with us, we have not, nor shall not under that notion refuse them, if they be fit for the ordinances.¹

In fact, New Englanders practised intercommunion among themselves because the churches were satisfied with each other's standards of membership; when Christians came from England, however, the loose admission practices there gave no guarantee, and it became necessary to examine each one individually before communicating with him.² They did regard the English churches as 'true' churches,³ but they did not regard all their 'matter' as pure; thus, ultimately, intercommunion was permitted only with churches they knew to be composed of 'pure matter'; members of other churches had to be examined individually to ascertain whether or not they were visible saints. The state of the New England heart on the matter was aptly exemplified by Winslow's earnest desire

that a distinction might once be put between the precious and the vile, particular Churches might be gathered by the powerfull preaching of the Word, those onely admitted into communion, whose hearts the Lord perswades to submit unto the Iron rod of the Gospel; O how sweet then would the communion of the Churches be! How thorow the Reformation! how easie would the differences be reconciled between the Presbyterian and Independent way!⁴

¹Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 70 (italics mine).

²Cf. the similar practice of the Apologists while in exile; Apologeticall Narration, pp. 6-8. Cotton claimed they would not need to be so selective, once the Presbyterian discipline was established in England; see his Way Cleared, I. p. 90.

³See above, pp. 58-63, esp. p. 63, n. 1.

⁴Winslow, Hypocrisie Vnmasked, p. 94.

But until that happened, the New England Elders had to stand at the gates of the churches with a flaming sword in their hands, to keep back the unworthy from the Lord's Table.

In addition to the Lord's Supper, intercommunion in two other ordinances had to be explained, if there were no Catholic Visible Church in which the Seals were dispensed: they were, Baptism and excommunication.

The question of Baptism will be more fully dealt with in a later chapter.¹ But in this place it is proper to ask, if Baptism is not only a sign but also a seal of admission, to what does it admit? For the Presbyterians we have examined, it admitted to the Catholic Visible Church. But for the Independents who rejected such a Church, the fact of Baptism could be something of a surd. It did not admit only to the particular congregation (no one could be rebaptised), nor to all congregations (no one could be a member of more than one), nor to the mystical body of Christ (although the idea had been suggested), nor, in fact, to the genus 'a congregational church' (since a visible Christian could hardly belong to a genus of visible churches; possibly to the species of which he was being made a membrum, but this brings one back to the first position). It would seem as though Baptism simply admitted one to the number of the baptised.

The practice of communion in excommunication was easier to explain. When a man was excommunicated from a particular congregation, Presbyterians said that the officers acted as

¹See below, pp. 174-187.

officers of the Catholic Visible Church, and so excluded the man from communion in all churches in the world. The Independent alternative was simpler:

That he that is excommunicated out of one Church (if duely) is excluded out of all: is not because the whole Church is one visible body; but because all the particular Churches agree in nature, and essence of Doctrine, Worship and Government, so that he that is unfit to be a member of one, is so of all: because they all require the same essentiall conditions.¹

Thomas Hooker followed the same line, but was somewhat more specific. He insisted, against Rutherford, that refusal of one congregation to admit to fellowship an excommunicate of another congregation did not argue that there was a Catholic Visible Church, but simply that the churches had certain things in common; thus a member of one would be recognised for a church member when he came to another; likewise, a member cast out of one because he was unfit, would likewise be unfit for membership in another.² The clear implication was that church officers followed the rule of the Word in casting a man out; if they did not, the New England teaching was that, not only might he be received in another congregation, but he had not actually been cast out of his own church. Ultimately, it was Christ in his Word who excommunicated; any censure which did not follow the Rule, was not valid; any that did, could be recognised as being valid in all congregations which followed the same Rule. As in the case of temporary admission to the Lord's Supper, or reception of members from other congregations,

¹Ellis, Vindiciae, p. 77; cf. p. 11f.

²See Hooker, Survey, I. pp. 236f, 241, 280.

each church reserved to itself the right to make trial of each case of excommunication with which it became involved. And if one church decided that another had proceeded contrary to the Rule, it could hold communion with an excommunicate from that church, on the grounds that he had not really been excommunicated.¹

The Nature and Extent of the Ministry

The question of intercommunion leads inevitably to the question of the nature of the Ministry, and the extent of the Minister's office. The point was often made, that if a member of one congregation could communicate in another church than his own, then that other Minister could, by inference, do ecclesiastical acts outwith his own flock;² "And if so, why may not an Elder assist a Church wanting Elders, in Ordination; or assist the Elders of other Churches in Jurisdiction?"³ Independents had to exercise great care in defining the limits of a Minister's authority. In the early days of the New England churches, some of the Elders would seem to have been zealous to do no ministerial acts whatsoever outside the limits of their own congregation.⁴ They would preach and pray (as private men), but would not administer

¹Among English Independents it would seem to have been necessary to persuade the censuring congregation to reconsider (see M.S. to A.S., p. 110); theoretically, this was not so in New England.

²See Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 35; Ball, Tryall, p. 31.

³Hollingworth, Certain Queres, p. 26.

⁴See Thomas Lechford, Plain Dealing (1642), p. 15, where he reported that "when a Minister preacheth abroad, . . . this is held prophesying."

the Sacraments;¹ however, in time the general attitude became more liberal.²

If, then, a Minister was not, as the Presbyterians said he was, an officer of the Catholic Visible Church, having by his ordination an 'habitual' power to act anywhere when called, and needing only the call of a congregation to make it 'actual';³ and if his ability to act as an officer to other congregations than his own was not to be construed as proof of the existence of a general visible Church; then what was he, and how was his office to be construed? The solution was to separate the authority of the ministerial office from the benefits dispensed by official acts. By 1645, in New England, there was some measure of agreement on this position.⁴ Hooker said that in any one ministerial act, there were included "Church-priviledges" and "Church-power," and men received that of which they were capable. A Minister could perform ministerial acts to those not in his own congregation, but his authority was limited to the members of his own flock. He had no power to require others to

¹See Rathband, op. cit., p. 42f.

²Church-Government &c., II. p. 62; one feels that liberality was not due to Presbyterian objections, but to the increasing number of churches, and consequent increase of the occasions on which the need for the benefits of another Minister's office would arise.

³See Hudson, Vindication, pp. 45, 48, 138f, 141, 169, 234.

⁴See Norton, Responsio, pp. 70f, 80-84; and Hooker, op. cit., I. pp. 294-296. Both were completed in the latter part of 1645.

hear the Word preached, or to communicate (which he had over his own congregation), nor had others the right to require the Word and Sacraments of him (which his own people did have).¹

The effect, then, was that a Minister could preach and administer the Sacraments to members of other congregations, or in other churches, but he could not exercise any authoritative acts outside his own congregation (such as ordination and censures). Inter-communion and (advisory) Synods were thus possible, but each congregation retained the right of jurisdiction within itself.

According to John Norton, a Minister not only had authoritative power in his own congregation and 'ecclesiastical' power towards all visible Christians in all churches, but 'ministerial' power towards all men.² This addition was a result of Apollonius' question,

Whether the end and effect of the work of the Ecclesiastical Ministry be only the Confirmation and Edification of those Church-members who are already converted and truly godly; so as that Pastours are not more obliged by vertue of their Ecclesiastical function to convert the straying soules . . . then all beleivers . . . are by the common duty of Charity bound to doe?³

The question was a severe embarrassment. One of the great aims of the colony, the New Englanders had avowed, was the conversion

¹See Norton, op. cit., p. 84; Hooker, op. cit., I. p. 295; John Cotton, A Defence of Mr. John Cotton &c., (1658), II. p. 58.

²See Norton, op. cit., pp. 70f, 80-84; the whole concept, Hooker's as well as Norton's, does not seem to one to 'belong' to the Independent system of thought, but to have been inserted out of necessity.

³Apollonius, Consideration, p. 66f.

of the heathen, of whom the godly in England had heard so many reports.¹ But many writings soon made it common fame that these Independents were either unwilling or unable to bring the 'salvages' to Christ.² "Of all that ever crossed the American Seas, they are noted as most neglectful of the work of Conversion."³ Presbyterians had foretold that Independents would be weak in evangelism,⁴ and events were proving them right. Although there was some activity among the Indians, it would seem to have proceeded in a desultory fashion; few were diligent in the work except John Eliot (the famous 'Apostle to the Indians'); little, if anything, was done prior to 1643. In 1644, "a considerable number of ministers" in England petitioned Parliament concerning the propagation of the Gospel among the North American Indians;⁵ and thereafter activity among them increased somewhat,

¹See, e.g., Thomas Morton, New English Canaan &c. (1637), pp. 55, 57; but even as early as 1606, King James I had chartered two trading companies for Virginia, chiefly for "propagating of Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness" (Felt, op. cit., p. 21). In 1649 'The President and Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England' sent Eliot several thousand pounds for the work; see J.T. Adams, 'John Eliot,' in DAB, VI, 79f.

²See e.g.: Baylie, Dissvative, p. 60; Lechford, op. cit., pp. 21, 33; Rathband, op. cit., p. 44.

³Baylie, loc. cit.

⁴See Ball, Tryall, p. 55; Herle, Independency, p. 43.

⁵Felt, Ecclesiastical History, p. 534; for other facts on the Indian situation, see ibid., pp. 495, 524ff, 528, 576, 584, 588f, 596, and Kellaway, The New England Company, passim.

but with very small success.¹

There were, of course, many obstacles in the way of evangelising the natives;² but not the least of them was Independent polity as it developed in New England.³ For one thing, it was difficult to see how the heathen could be got into congregations; they were unfit, for the most part, for cohabitation with the New English, and for joining their churches;⁴ and how churches could be formed among them when they could not be baptised (since they were not church members) was a thorny question.⁵ The other important difficulty was that a Minister bore office-relationship only to his own congregation; "they have not to do

¹In 1647, Shepard was hopeful that "it is time for the conversion of the Indians"; apud Felt, op. cit., p. 603.

²Ironically, one such obstacle was the very millennial expectation which had first driven men to New England; in this teaching, "there will bee no great hope of any Nationall conversion, till Antichrist be ruined, and the Jewes converted" (Cotton, Way Cleared, I. p. 78; the Indians were regarded as nations); cf. Kellaway, New England Company, p. 5, who also mentions another factor, viz., their concern to establish a model Commonwealth (p. 4).

³See ibid., p. 4f: "the fact is that neither the theology nor the polity of New England was evangelical in character or readily adaptable to his [the Indian's] temporal and spiritual needs."

⁴Language was one great problem: as Cotton said (Way Cleared, I. p. 76), "the Indians have been slow to learne our language, especially in matters of Religion (howsoever in Trading they soon understood us:)."

⁵One was "admitted into the Church, and then Baptized"; Stone, Congregational Church, p. 37. Hudson (Vindication, p. 142) claimed that this was an inversion of Apostolic practice, and would, together with the lack of any idea of a Catholic Visible Church, hinder evangelism.

with them being without."¹ Norton's attempt to remedy this defect in New England polity (by saying that Ministers had a 'ministerial' relationship to all men) was by the introduction of an element foreign to the system itself.² But his views found little echo amongst the early New England divines: for them, Ministers as such had no relationship to those outside the churches; to such they were private (albeit gifted) men, concerned with them only "when opportunity and liberty is offered." As officers, they were bound to endeavour the conversion only of their own members (i.e., baptised children and such as might be hypocrites). They were bound by Christ's ordinance to care only

¹Noted by Lechford as one of the reasons given by the New Englanders for not endeavouring the conversion of the Indians (see Plain Dealing, p. 21). Baylie made the same charge, saying "their relation is to their Flock, who are Church-members, converted already to their hand by the labours of other men" (Dissvative, p. 60); cf. Rathband, loc. cit.; Cawdrey, Vindiciae, p. 43f.

²He implied that Ministers would "convert the straying souls of those, who live in the world," when such sinners came to their churches to hear them preach (see Responsio, p. 89); but Indians who were not under the colony's civil jurisdiction could not be compelled to come in.

The following citation is of interest in relation to Norton's doctrine of a Pastor's 'ministerial' relationship to those outside his flock: "the practice had been for the church to vote for the minister, and the parish afterwards to sanction their vote; and the minister thus selected was, in ecclesiastical language, 'the pastor of the church, and the minister of the people'" (E. Buck, Massachusetts Ecclesiastical Law [Boston, Mass., 1866], p. 49, apud Dexter, Congregationalism, p. 618).

for their own flock.¹ The root of the trouble lay in the common belief that "faith in those not yet converted, ordinarily comes from hearing the word preached, by men ministerially sent";² preaching was an authoritative office-act; lay-preaching, or 'prophecyng,' was severely restricted in New England. A Minister of one church was only a layman to the Indians; it was doubtful whether he could preach to them; it was forbidden to gather them into a church; it was heretical to assert that he could baptise any who were not already in Church-Covenant.³

¹See Welde, Answer, p. 58; Hooker, op. cit., I. p. 84f, IV. pp. 31, 34; cf. Baylie, Dissvative, p. 167. Hooker's ingenuity in devising a rationale for inter-communion did not extend to finding a way for Ministers to act as missionaries.

²Norton, op. cit., p. 94.

³In March, 1639, Lechford formally remonstrated with the General Court for not allowing churches to be gathered among the Indians by Ministers acting as evangelists; see op. cit., p. 33.

An example of the general state of mind in New England concerning the conversion of the Indians is found in Winslow's remark that "we are not out of hope in time to bring them to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, as will appeare by a small Treatise of that kinde" (Hypocrisie Vnmasked, p. 85). He had been in New England for twenty-six years when he penned that sentence.

The "small Treatise" referred to was probably The Day-Breaking, if not the Sun-Rising of the Gospell with the Indians in New-England (1647). It was followed by others with equally impressive titles: The Glorious Progress (1649), The Light Appearing (1651), Tears of Repentance (1653), A Late and further Manifestation of the Progress (1655), The banners of Grace and love (1657), and many others. They described the lonely efforts of Eliot, and Thomas Mayhew, to civilize, educate and evangelise some few Indians; by 1674, they had about 1100 Christian natives; these were scattered, and the work ruined, by King Philip's War.

On the whole, New Englanders tended to rejoice more when the Indians were decimated by plagues and wars, than when they were converted.

Kingdom or City?

Before leaving the subject of the Church as a whole, we must briefly note a tendency which seems peculiar to Independent thought, and which occurred with remarkable frequency in New England writings on polity. It is the habit of thinking of an individual congregation as a city. The tendency probably arose because of the points of similarity between the polities of a congregation and a city, leading to the occasional use of the latter as an illustration for some point of the former. Whatever the origin, it became common to use points of corporation polity almost as if they could prove corresponding features of congregational government.

One of the most attractive aspects of the comparison was that a city was regarded as being formed and coming into existence, not by means of its Royal Charter, but by the combination and agreement of its members to join under one common government.¹ However, the theory of Social Contract was not unique to corporation polity; other points were. First, a city had the right to exercise "Government and rule" within itself, granted to it directly from the King; in like manner, the right of independent congregational self-government was each church's inalienable gift from Christ.² Second, a corporation possessed

¹See Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 76; Hooker, op. cit., I. pp. 50, 223f.

²See M.S. to A.S., p. 73; Hooker, op. cit., I. p. 50.

the general nature of 'corporation,' but this did not mean that it could act as a corporation generally (i.e., at large, outside its own limits);¹ likewise a congregation, while it was a species of the genus 'congregation,' acted only within its specific limits (for example, a man joining one church did not by that act come under the "particular jurisdiction" of any other²). Third, just as the power of the Mayor and other officers was confined to their own city only, and as they might not hold office in, or challenge authority over another city, not being members therein; so a Minister had office-relationship to his own flock only, and might not rule (esp. as a member of a Classis or Synod) over another, since he was not a member of it.³ Fourth, because of their common contract, members of the court or corporation could censure one another for misconduct, and (though they might not perform any acts of his office) they might censure the Mayor, and even deprive him of his office; likewise, in a congregation, the power of censure (both of members and officers)

¹See ibid., I. p. 221.

²See Ellis, op. cit., p. 74; cf. Rutherford, Due Right, II. p. 194f.

³See Welde, Answer, p. 55; Church-Government &c., II. p. 63; cf. Giles Firmin, Of Schism (1658), p. 81.

resided ultimately in the members.¹

The analogy of a city, so useful to Independents when thinking of a congregation, was rarely employed in reference to the Catholic Church, by the controversialists of either side. The analogy most popular with Presbyterians was the comparison of the Catholic Church to a single kingdom,² under one King and one set of laws; this had the advantage of building on the foundation

¹"No man conceives that the place and office of the Major is prejudiced because the corporation can for just causes censure him, though nor any nor all of them can exercise his office." Hooker, op. cit., I. p. 191; cf. II. p. 87f, III. pp. 34, 35. The weakness of the position becomes apparent here; it is not a true analogy, for the body of the citizens are left out of censure-rights, while the body of the congregation has them. The 'corporation' of a city corresponds to the congregational Presbytery, the body of the citizens to the 'brethren.' The usage was not consistent; brethren and citizens were made comparable, except in cases where it was desirable to give them some political rights, and then the brethren were compared to the corporation, or Council. See Cawdrey on this inconsistency (Vindiciae, sig. ~~xx~~² recto-~~xx~~³ verso); he pointed out that the comparison should run: Aldermen : Pastors and Teachers; Council : Ruling Elders; Citizens : Brethren. Viewed this way, he pointed out, there could be no question of the 'brethren' having authoritative concurrence with the officers (cf. sig. A1 verso et seq.).

²See, e.g., Hudson, Vindication, p. 79; Ellis used this analogy, too, but he meant by it that the Church was "one" kingdom in its unity as a genus, of which the congregations were parts; Vindiciae, p. 17. The whole Church (however understood) was rarely compared to a city by either side; Ellis did call it the "Body and Corporation, whereof beleivers are members," but he was referring to the mystical Church, not a political body (op. cit., p. 52); and Hollingworth asked, "Is not the whole Church of God one Corporation, one City . . . ? And may not then the Aldermen and Officers . . . joyn together in a Court of Common counsel for . . . Government . . . ?" (op. cit., p. 26).

the Independents had already laid down in the city-congregation analogy.¹ It was admitted, first, that every city was complete in itself, and competent to do all acts proper to itself;

but this hinders it not from being a member of a greater body politick, viz. the Kingdom or Common-wealth whereto it belongeth.²

So likewise, a congregation was part of a larger political kingdom. Second, as the assizes of one city tried a man by the laws of the whole kingdom, and sentenced him with a sentence which was valid everywhere in that kingdom; so the censures of a particular church, delivered according to the law of Christ, were valid throughout the whole Church.³ Third, just as, in a kingdom, not all the citizens lived in the cities; so also, in Christ's visible kingdom there were Christians who were not settled members of one particular congregation.⁴ And fourth (and perhaps most important), just as one had first to be a citizen of England before he was capable of being a citizen of London; so also, one had first to be a member of Christ's Catholic Visible Kingdom before he could become a member of a congregation (even though both England and the Catholic Church were integrals, composed of

¹See Hudson, op. cit., p. 110f; Noyes, Temple, p. 1f.

²Hudson, An Addition or Postscript, p. 6; the Independent Apologists admitted that a congregation became responsible to other churches when it erred grossly, as a city did to its state; see Apologetically Narration, p. 14.

³See Hudson, Vindication, p. 103f.

⁴See Hudson, Essence, p. 42.

similar parts).¹ Since Independents denied the idea of the Catholic Visible Church as a totum integrale, they did not have to pay much attention to the analogies, such as this one, that went along with it.²

The problem with this kind of example, and especially with the comparison of a congregation to a city, was its tendency to be transmuted into a proof, since there seemed so many parallels between the example and the thing exemplified. "I know what men argue from the Analogy of a Mayor in a Corporation," said Giles Firmin, adding, "which is no proof, but only illustration."³

¹See Hudson, Vindication, p. 100f.

²See Allin and Shepard, op. cit., pp. 79, 82.

³Firmin, loc. cit.

IV. THE COVENANT

Here is a piece or two of such Divinitie as I never heard or read before: but uno absurdo dato, mille sequuntur.

--William Rathband, A Briefe Narration, p. 20.

Many good people scruple their Church Covenant, so highly tearmed by the most of them, a part of the Covenant of grace.

--Thomas Lechford,
Plain Dealing, p. 22.

Sources of the Doctrine

The doctrine and practice of the church covenant was the keystone of the arch of New England church polity, and their touchstone for determining the validity of every church in Christendom. As they enunciated and practised it, it was extremely difficult to warrant, either Biblically or historically; yet in many ways, it was a natural outcome of the theological and political thought of the age. And so essential is it to the Congregational genius, that when all else in the polity of their fathers suffers change or decay, some modern Congregational churchmen still look to the covenant (explicit or implicit) as the hallmark of a congregation in Christ's Church, and the signpost toward the ecumenical Church of the future.¹

¹See, e.g., Douglas Horton, Congregationalism: A Study in Church Polity (London, 1952), pp. 79-90, and esp. p. 81f.

Although it had an intellectual root in the idea of Social Contract, and an historical root in the urgent need (best seen in Robert Browne) to find a way for the few to reform without waiting for the many, it also drew theological nourishment from the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace, or 'Federal Theology.' It is this latter relationship which we shall examine first.

Theological Sources

Perry Miller remarks,

between 1600 and 1650, English Puritans were compelled, in order to preserve the truths already known, to add to their theology at least one that hitherto had not been known, or at least not emphasized, the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace. . . . none elsewhere made it so all-important, so central to the whole structure of belief, as did these Englishmen. . . . the New England leaders were all pupils, friends, or disciples of those who formulated it.¹

It was originally designed to preserve the teachings of orthodox Calvinism against both Arminianism and Antinomianism (although it soon proved to have a life and power all its own.² It was most lucidly systematised and expounded by John Ball, in his popular and influential book, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace.³

¹Miller, New England Mind, p. 366.

²See ibid., pp. 367, 397.

³"It contains all that has been admitted into the Westminster standards, or generally received on this head among British Calvinists"; A.F. Mitchell, The Westminster Assembly (London, 1883), p. 377.

The principal distinction of this mode of theological thought was that God's dealings with man were seen as being confined to two successive Covenants (both comprising a promise on God's part, with a restipulation on man's). These were not, however, the Covenant of the Law (i.e., of Moses) and the Covenant of the Gospel, but rather the Covenant of Nature (made with Adam before the Fall) and of Grace (made with fallen man). The Covenant of Nature was made with one who was capable of perfect obedience, which it demanded of him; there was neither place nor necessity for the forgiveness of sins; and it promised, on God's part, eternal animal life in paradise. It required no Mediator or Saviour, but was founded on "the Creation of man and integrity of humane nature,"¹ and the reward was a matter of debt, not of grace. The Covenant of Grace, on the other hand, was made with sinners, absolutely incapable of perfect obedience (which was therefore not required; faith and 'sincere' obedience² were demanded instead); sins were forgiven, and eternal life in heaven was promised. This Covenant was made through a Divine-human Mediator and Saviour, so that "the Redemption of man by Christ is the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace."³ The reward of eternal life was thus a free gift made

¹John Ball, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace (1645), p. 25.

²See ibid., p. 80f.

³Ibid., p. 25.

to the elect.¹ The advantage of this system was

That the Fathers before Christ, ever since the fall of Adam, and Christians in the times of the Gospell, did live under the same Covenant for substance, but not for manner of administration . . .²

Once this basic dichotomy had been established, the order of the historical dispensations of the Covenants was outlined as follows:

- I. The Covenant of Nature (made with unfallen man).
- II. The Covenant of Grace (made with fallen man).
 - A. The Covenant promised:
 - 1. To Adam.
 - 2. To the Patriarchs (esp. Abraham).
 - 3. To the people of Israel:
 - a. Until the return from Babylon:
 - i. Under Moses.
 - ii. To David.
 - b. After the Babylonian Captivity.
 - B. The Covenant promulgated (after Pentecost), under which the doctrine is evangelical, the Law no longer a curse, and the Church no longer confined to Israel.³

This doctrine was a bulwark against both the Antinomian and the Arminian. To the Antinomian it said that since the Covenant of Grace included the time of the Law, "the Law is and ever was a rule of life to men in Covenant."⁴ "Do this and live" described "the subject of life eternall, not the cause why life and salvation is conferred."⁵ To depend upon exact fulfilment of the

¹See ibid., pp. 24-27, where the system is summarised.

²Ibid., p. 27.

³See ibid., p. 198; for this outline, see ibid., p. 27, and the table of contents, sig. A4 verso.

⁴Ibid., p. 111; cf. p. 113.

⁵Ibid., p. 136f; cf. p. 142.

Law for salvation has been damnable since the Fall;¹ but the Law was always needed, under the Covenant of Grace (both before and after Christ), to show man that only Christ could save him,² and to be that standard of conduct which the regenerate would receive power to fulfil.³ Faith was not a condition of our Justification, but an instrumental cause thereof;⁴ and good works (of which Faith was the efficient cause) "are not the cause of, but only a precedent qualification or condition to finall forgiveness and eternall blisse."⁵ To the Arminian, however, this doctrine said that in the Covenant of Grace, God saved men, as he always had done, by Grace alone;⁶ there was nothing a man could do to fulfil the conditions of the Covenant unless he personally had first been taken into it by God; in this Covenant it was the world, and not God, which was reconciled, and that with an "actuall, effectuall, particular reconciliation . . . received by them in the Covenant of grace."⁷ Any who were not actually reconciled, were not included in the Covenant: "we may strongly argue, Christ died not for every man, because God is not the God of all by Covenant."⁸ Thus, in this system of theological thought,

¹See ibid., p. 117.

²See ibid., p. 139.

³See ibid., p. 136f.

⁴See ibid., pp. 18-20; cf. p. 66f.

⁵Ibid., p. 20.

⁶See ibid., p. 210.

⁷Ibid., p. 219.

⁸Ibid., p. 243; cf. pp. 244, 249, 255, 301.

God's Grace (to the elect) was needed to fulfil the Law; and the fulfilment of the Law was a chief result of Grace.

When dealing with the ordo salutis in the individual, and the relation of Covenant theology to the existing Church, Ball's thought was not as highly developed as that of his New England brethren. Concerning the order of salvation, he said that God often prepared the way for the individual's salvation by various means, but that these were neither absolutely necessary, nor always used.¹ The work itself begins when we hear a promise of what God will do, and a statement of what is required from us. We believe that God will keep his promise, to refresh the thirsty soul (although this is not justifying faith), and so we repent and believe. The whole process is caused by the Spirit of God, working through the Word,² and specifically through such promises as: that sins are pardonable in Christ through faith; that those who thirst for salvation are especially invited to come to him; and that those who believe in him for salvation, have obtained remission of sins.³ No man, however, is pardoned until he has faith.⁴

Ball's thought concerning the visible Church seems close to the dictum extra ecclesiam salus non est. "Men are gathered into

¹See ibid., p. 336ff; some of the means were afflictions, conviction of sin, natural terrors, visions, gifts and graces, or by giving some up to the height of their sin.

²See ibid., pp. 347-350.

³See ibid., pp. 225, 229.

⁴See ibid., p. 290; cf. p. 293.

the Kingdome of Christ by effectuall holy vocation"¹ which "is partly externall, partly internall. Externall, by the Ministry of the Word, ordinarily propounded by men,"² that is to say, by Ministers; it is the "morall instrument of conversion, which God is pleased to use, without which he doth not ordinarily work."³ Since, then, God does not redeem them who have not had the Word preached to them,⁴ "and the word given to a people, is Gods covenanting with them,"⁵ therefore, the visible Church is the Covenant community, the assembly of the called; "as vocation inward and outward are not two callings, but one and the same: so the Church visible and invisible are not two Churches, but the same Church differently considered."⁶ "He cannot be out of the Church, who is in Covenant with God: nor can he be a member of the Church, who is not in Covenant."⁷ The Sacraments are seals of this Covenant. However, not all who are called externally, and in Covenant externally, are in Covenant "savingly, effectually,

¹Ibid., p. 324.

²Ibid., p. 326.

³Ibid., p. 328.

⁴See ibid., p. 233; cf. p. 238.

⁵John Ball, A Tryall of the New-Chvrch Way (1644), p. 20.

⁶Ball, Treatise of the Covenant, p. 345.

⁷Idem.

and in speciall manner."¹ For comparison with New England doctrine on the same subject, the following points especially should be noted about Ball's view of the relationship of the visible Church to the Covenant of Grace: the Church is founded, and the elect are saved, by way of Covenant (i.e., by a contract between God and man); the elect are assumed to be within the larger, visible Covenant (that is, for the most part); the difference between the elect and the reprobate within the Covenant is not emphasised, nor does it seem that they can well be distinguished from one another; and, since the internal Covenant is both hidden and fully efficacious, emphasis tends to fall on the external, or Church Covenant, and hence on the action of men rather than that of God.²

What theological differences existed between Covenant doctrine in Old and New England were not basic, but merely a matter of emphasis, arising largely out of the special needs of New England church polity. We find in William Ames, in shorter compass, the same pattern of Covenant doctrine as in Ball; their differences are minor; and Ames's theology provided the guidelines

¹Ibid., p. 24; cf. pp. 254, 347. The presence of hypocrites, who "taste of the spirit" but do not eat thereof, who "bring forth fruit," but not to ripeness, is difficult to explain within the limits of Covenant theology; see ibid., pp. 238-241.

²See ibid., p. 24.

for that of the New England Divines.¹ An important factor in the development of early New England Federal Theology was the great importance of the church covenant, and the natural tendency to see it in relation to the Covenant of Grace. The New Englanders were quite orthodox in their opposition to Arminianism² and in regard to the hiddenness of God's Covenant with his elect;³ yet they encouraged something very like freedom of will and salvation by works, by the way in which they linked the covenant which formed the visible church to the theological Covenant.⁴

The basic intention behind New England church polity was to include in the church covenant only those who were already in the Covenant of Grace; they pointed to Abraham, whose "faith was thoroughly tryed, before he had the Seale of Church-Covenant given him."⁵ Thus, the extremely practical problem of identifying those whom God had called into his Covenant determined some of

¹See Ames, Marrow, esp., I.x.9-11, 25-33; I.xxiv.10-22. Unlike Ball, he did not emphasise man's restipulation in the Covenant (see I.xxiv.14), nor did he articulate the various historical dispensations. He made no clear relationship between the Covenant of Grace and the church covenant.

²See John Cotton, The New Covenant (1654), pp. 6, 16, 48f.

³See Thomas Hooker, The Covenant of Grace Opened (1649), p. 53.

⁴Miller points out that one result of the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace, whereby the will of the elect was enlisted for his own sanctification, was that those who were reprobate would will their own destruction, and that therefore the mass (nearly four-fifths of the New England population) could be "confidently ruled out of the fold" (New England Mind, p. 456).

⁵Cotton, New Covenant, p. 3. This is more fully discussed below, pp. 159-167.

the peculiar New England emphases in the doctrine of the Covenant itself.

The colonial divines shared with other Federal theologians the belief that "the free justification of men under a free Covenant of grace doth establish the obedience of the Law;"¹ but with this confident stride away from Antinomianism they tumbled headlong into a new kind of Arminianism, or legalism.² Since God gave his Spirit to Christians for the particular purpose of strengthening them to keep the Law,³ the obvious inference was that one sure mark of those in the Covenant of Grace would be their ability to keep the Law; "sanctification," as Miller wryly comments, "became a very handy evidence of justification."⁴ With this development went a complex ordo salutis, very fully articulated because it was needed to help the elders and congregations determine which of the applicants for membership were actually the elect.⁵ In it, God was seen as dealing with the individual soul in the same way he had dealt with his people through the ages: he gave them the Law to "aggravate their sin"

¹Ibid., p. 118f.

²This 'neo-Arminianism' in turn provided fuel for the grass-roots prairie-fire of Antinomianism which blazed up so brightly in 1637 that it was seen from across the ocean; see 'The Antinomian Controversy,' Appendix A, section 5, pp. 300-305.

³See Cotton, op. cit., p. 119.

⁴Miller, New England Mind, p. 388.

⁵It is, of course, true, that the New England divines very soon acknowledged that there was no absolute certainty in these determinations, and that some reprobates could and did creep past even the shrewdest Elders; see below, pp. 168, 293.

and drive them to Christ,¹ first by a "Spirit of Bondage," drawing men from their sins into the "Covenant of works," and then by a "Spirit of Burning," showing men that their good works were so much hay and stubble;² then they were offered an "Absolute promise of free-grace," with no qualifications required, for their first coming to Christ.³ By this they had union and communion with him, from which flowed: first, and immediately, the two "Relative Blessings" of Adoption and Justification; then, gradually, the two "Positive Blessings" of Sanctification and Glorification.⁴ The former was a mysterious "pronenesse in a justified person to be lively in duty. . . . and the same Spirit quickeneth us unto holy duties;"⁵ the latter was a sort of improved personality, "a glorious work in that soul, and others may see it though himselfe seeth nothing that he hath received."⁶

John Cotton did not believe that man's ability to keep the Law was the only, or even the best evidence that he was in fact justified; those who were best at legal duties, he said, were those whom the Lord had carried no further than a Spirit of

¹See Cotton, op. cit., pp. 107-110.

²See ibid., pp. 20-22; cf. p. 50.

³See ibid., pp. 57, 92, 94f, 102f. Christ fulfilled the qualifications; men could do nothing themselves; see ibid., pp. 104-106.

⁴See ibid., pp. 31-34.

⁵Ibid., p. 34.

⁶Ibid., p. 35. For a fuller description of this whole ordo salutis, see ibid., pp. 174-192.

Bondage, or a Covenant of Works. They gloried in their own strength, were hypocrites without knowing it (and might, indeed, go their whole life long without ever discerning it), and did not resign themselves wholly to Jesus Christ, not only for their justification but for their Sanctification, trusting him to fulfil not only the absolute promise of free Grace, but every conditional promise, every duty which they were required to do. He admitted that to distinguish in men between that Sanctification

which floweth from the Law, and that which is of the Gospel, is a matter so narrow, that the Angels in Heaven have much ado to discern who differ: a work fitter for Angels to cut the scantling in it, then for the Ministers of the Gospel . . .¹

At the same time, the exigencies of New England polity forced him to aver,

Notwithstanding this neere resemblance between legall and evangelicall holines, yet there is a reall difference between them, and such a difference as is discernable to Christians, whose wits are exercised in the wayes of the Spirit, and in the word of God . . .²

What the difference boiled down to, at least theoretically, was that the elect saw their Justification before they took any confidence in signs of their Sanctification.³ But the main tendency of New England Covenant thought can be seen even in Cotton (who had what some of his colleagues regarded as a near-heretical emphasis on free Grace). If Grace were free, and given

¹Ibid., p. 59.

²Ibid., p. 77.

³See ibid., pp. 76f, 164; passages like these help explain why Mistress Hutchinson followed Cotton from England (see below, p. 302, n. 1).

in a free and unconditional promise, of what use to the elect were the conditional promises? Cotton answered,

They are of use to helpe us to Know our spirituall state, and means to discern thereof: All these qualifications to which the promises are made, are fruits of the Spirit, and will more or lesse declare unto you, your sanctified state, which is a marvelous blessing: Upon the promises made unto such conditions, the Lord stirreth up the hearts of his people, to seek for such conditions to which the promises are made, and when the Lord hath given them, he openeth their hearts to see what he hath given them, and so to discern their sanctified estate.¹

The result of this kind of teaching was bound to be voluntarism; as Miller notes, "the final outcome in all New England preaching of the covenant theory was a shamelessly pragmatic injunction. It permitted the ministers to inform their congregations that if any of them could fulfill the Covenant, they were elected. The way to find out was to try."² Successful moral endeavour was not the way to Heaven; but it was the way to discover if one was, in fact, of the elect.

Scriptural Sources

Having indicated the theological background to the New England doctrine of church covenant, we turn briefly to its Scriptural sources. These are surprisingly few, and depend very greatly on the identification in Independent thought between the nation of Israel in the old dispensation and a single congregation

¹Ibid., p. 98; on the question of Sanctification as evidence of Justification, see his excellent treatment, ibid., pp. 58-85.

²Miller, New England Mind, p. 395; cf. pp. 382-397.

since Pentecost, "in things of common and moral equity."¹
The covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:7) was a church covenant,
and made him and his family a church;² Israel was made a
national Church by its national covenant, propounded by God,
and agreed to by all Israel together (Deut. 29:9-13);³ and
Jeremiah, speaking of the destruction of Babylon, seemed to be
seeing a vision of the Mayflower and the Arabella when he fore-
told that the children of Israel

shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask
the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying,
Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual
covenant that shall not be forgotten.⁴

And they pointed to Isaiah 56:3-7 as proof that all who would
enter the Church of Israel had to join by laying hold of the
Covenant.⁵

¹Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 29.

²Rutherford replied: "That covenant is the covenant of grace,
made with all the people of the Jewes"; Abraham and his family
had been a church before that time; Due Right, I. p. 102.

³Rutherford objected that this too was the Covenant of Grace;
that in any event it was no proof for their church covenant, since
the most part of the Hebrew confederates were "in a carnal estate"
(v. 4), and since it was made with the absent as well (v. 15);
and that in any event they were a church before they took this
covenant (to deny which was to imply what Papists accused them of
saying, viz., that there was a time when God had no visible Church
on earth); see ibid., I. pp. 102-109.

⁴Rutherford objected that church covenants were not
perpetual; see ibid., p. 116.

⁵"To lay hold on the covenant . . . is to keep the covenant
. . . and so all who spake sense on that place, and never one
dreamed of a Church-covenant before" (ibid., p. 113).

But when it came to finding the precise 'Pattern from the Mount' for this essential of a true New Testament church, the New Englanders were in trouble, and their adversaries knew it; as Hudson said:

It is a marvel that seeing so much weight lyeth on this particular Church-Covenant, viz. the interest in the seals of the Covenant of grace, the Scripture should never give any intimation of it, or directions about it.¹

Cotton's explanation was, to say the least, ingenious. He began with the conviction that the churches of the New Testament were, in fact, formed by covenant; this, however, had to be kept secret, since the magistrates (who were not members of the churches) were suspicious of 'covenants' and 'covenanters,' and regarded them as dangerous to the civil peace. The Apostles, knowing this, used similitudes and parables in their letters to disguise the existence of this covenant from outside eyes. Nevertheless, what they said obviously implied that church members made a covenant with the Lord and with one another. Free, unattached Christians must confederate in order to enter a relationship where all have to bear watchfulness, and some, authority, toward the others;² the congregation at Corinth was espoused to Christ (II Cor. 11:2),

¹Hudson, Vindication, p. 225; cf. Rutherford, Survey, p. 143f; R. [ichard] H. [ollingworth], An Examination of Sundry Scriptures (1645), p. 10.

²See Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 92.

which must have been by a covenant;¹ but most important were the implications of the fact that the church was described as a city:

Now every Citie is founded in some confederacy by oath or such like bond, and every Citizen is received into the same Citie, by taking the same oath, or entering into the same bond.²

Social Contract

This brings us to the third important source of the idea of the church covenant: the theory of Social Contract. One suspects that the Independent discovery that New Testament churches were formed by covenant owed a great deal to their political belief that

there can be no instances given of any free Society, civill or sacred, that was under policy, but that it arose from combination.³

The Covenant theology of men like Perkins, Ames and Preston, with its emphasis on the will of man, was closely tied to political contractarianism; but Miller maintains that we cannot determine whether they came to the former because of the latter, or vice versa.⁴ "This much is indubitable, that when New England was settled the two covenants, the religious and the social, had

¹"It is a weake cause, that hangeth upon the untwisted thred of a misapplied metaphor" (Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 118).

²Cotton, Way of the Churches, p. 62, q.v. for his discussion of this point. Cf. Davenport and Hooke, loc. cit., who duplicated Cotton's points, and added the analogies of the church as a body (ligaments being comparable to the covenant) and as a house ("made by orderly and firmly joyning, cementing, mortising, and brasing the partes together").

³Allin and Shepard, op. cit., p. 91.

⁴See Miller, New England Mind, p. 412.

become one in the minds of the leaders."¹

The idea was not born with Locke in the late seventeenth century; it could be found, not only in the above-named divines, but back through the intellectual history of the West. It had been known in Plato's time; it breathes through Aristotle's Politics; it was the basis of Roman Law; its popularity had been renewed by St Thomas' presentation of it in De Regimine Principium; Sir Robert Filmer pointed out that "Cardinal Bellarmine and Calvin both look askint this way"; and it cropped up in other authors whose names were as well known to New Englanders as their own (Beza, Mornay du Plessis, Boucher, Knox, Buchanan, Grotius and Richard Hooker). They concentrated largely on the idea of the Contract of Government, by which, as in the Roman Rex Legia, the authority of government arises from the contract made between the people and their governors. But two thinkers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (also well known to the New England divines) saw that this Contract implied a prior one among those who are to be governed, which gives being to the society itself; they were the Jesuit Suarez and the German who expounded the Dutch system, Althusius.²

¹Ibid., p. 414.

²For most of the facts in this paragraph, see Sir Ernest Barker in Social Contract (London, 1947), pp. v-xvi, and Professor John Herman Randall, jr., The Making of the Modern Mind (Boston, Massachusetts, 1940), pp. 181-192 and 341-345.

Thus, as we shall see, those who were to settle New England took the idea of the political Contract (or, more properly, Contracts) quite for granted, as "evident by the light of nature,"¹ and therefore as "the Commandment of the Lord."² In this kind of intellectual atmosphere it became impossible for some men to acquiesce in any plan to re-form the Church from the top down. For those who took the Contract to be the divine plan for human society, it was not a big step to arrive at the conviction that it must be the divine plan for the divine society. Of course, even without this conviction, those who believed that further reform was called for could still have gathered into small groups of like-minded people; but they could never have been easy in their consciences in the face of the powerful claims of the national Church. The theory of Contract helped to provide a strong bulwark, a water-tight bulkhead against these claims. The Congregational churches had not merely been reformed in life, discipline, worship, membership, and doctrine; they had been reformed, re-built from the ground up, founded upon the covenant of all the members with God in Christ, and with one another. They were secure.

Again and again (as we have seen³) the New English works on church polity compared the church to a city. Before church covenant, as before Social Contract, the church and the city (or any other civil government) had no existence; "Gods people are a

¹Cotton, Way of the Churches, p. 4.

²Eliot, Christian Commonwealth, p. 1. ³See above, pp. 126-130.

a free people, and . . . combination issues from free consent";¹
"Every spirituall or Ecclesiasticall corporation receives its
being from a spirituall combination."² "For . . . there is
no other way given whereby a people (sui Juris) free from naturall
and compulsory engagements, can be united or combined together
into one visible body . . . but only by mutuall Covenant."³
Also, but less often, we find references to the Contract of
Government: "Those in whose choice it is whether any shall rule
over them or no; from their voluntary subjection it is, that
the party chosen hath right, and stands posessed of rule and
authority over them."⁴ Norton alone among them seems to have
regarded the covenant as primarily a Contract of Government.⁵

There was one point in the doctrine and practice of the
covenant which demanded careful exposition on the part of the
New Englanders. In Contract theory, sovereign power was created
by the Social Contract, and then entrusted to rulers by the

¹Hooker, Survey, I. p. 285.

²Ibid., I. p. 50.

³Cotton, Way, p. 4 (English italics mine); for other examples
of the same sort, see Eliot, loc. cit.; Allin and Shepard, Defence,
p. 86; Hooker, op. cit., I. pp. 50-55, 223f; Church-Government &c.,
II. p. 22.

⁴Hooker, op. cit., II. p. 72; Ames was clear that power of
jurisdiction flows from the covenant; see his Conscience with
the Power and Cases thereof (1639), IV.xxiv.2.

⁵"The Constitution of a particular Church, is a relationship
of submission and superiority among free men"; "no reason can be
given except mutual consent: upon which rests the political
relationship of superiority and submission among free men" (Norton,
Responsio, pp. 27, 97).

Contract of Government. When applied to ecclesiastical affairs this could be taken as implying not only that the fellowship had church-power inherent and resident in themselves, but that they could exercise it in default of any rulers. And there was a danger beyond this: the idea of Social Contract was like an arm, with a set of muscles which any group could use to lift the men of their choice to power; but like an arm, it had an opposed set of muscles which could pull them down again.¹

The Covenant and the Church

Church Covenant Defined

Before discussing the implications and ramifications of the church covenant, a definition of the thing itself is called for. William Ames (whose Medulla Theologica most New England divines would have had nearly by heart), having demonstrated that a particular church could not be constituted simply by a group of believers meeting or living together, "unlesse they be joyned together by a speciall bond among themselves," went on:

This bond is a covenant, either expresse or implicate, whereby believers doe particularly bind themselves, to performe all those duties, both toward God and one toward another, which pertaine to the respect and edification of the Church.²

¹"It is clear by analogy with perfect civil polities, where, if order be wanting, the supreme [authority] returns to the people" (ibid., p. 70f).

²Ames, Marrow, I.xxxii.15.

It was only this covenant which gave "constitution and being to a visible Church";¹ it was only this covenant which made possible the authority of the church governors (as well as the authority of 'watching' or care, which one member had over another).²

The relationship of this idea of the church covenant to the theory of Social Contract is obvious. There were generally three elements in the New England church covenants: (1) the covenant with the Lord as their God (and with Jesus as prophet, priest and king); (2) the covenant with one another in love and submission; and (3) an agreement to submit to all the ordinances and rules of the Gospel.³ In the second part we may see the Social Contract, and in the third, the Contract of Government; the first clause, one feels, served to establish the relationship of this covenant with the Covenant of Grace.

It is quite difficult to assess the New England mind on this subject of the relationship between the ecclesiastical and the divine covenants. English divines were amazed to hear that some New England Elders regarded their church covenant as a part of the Covenant of Grace.⁴ Some of the English sectaries apparently

¹Hooker, Survey, I. p. 46 (all italics).

²This is more fully discussed below, p. 217f.

³For examples of the New England church covenants, see Appendix A, section 3, pp. 296-298.

⁴See Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 22.

held this view, and there were doubtless emigrés to New England who carried it over with them. But hard colonial experience, which showed that even in the best-selected body of saints there would be some 'false matter,' caused a corresponding modification of this view of the relation between the two covenants. The discovery of even one wolf among the sheep makes the church as a community of true saints, an unrealisable dream, and, likewise, denies the possibility of an identity between the covenants. As Welde said, and New Englanders sooner or later recognised, a man could be in one covenant without being in the other.¹

Well into the 1640s, one can detect the attempt to maintain a close relationship between the two: the church covenant was, not a different or contrary covenant, but "an open profession of a mans subjection to that very Covenant [i.e., of Grace], specially in the things which concerne Church estate, into which estate the man is now entering";² it was "nothing else but a promise of obedience unto the Gospel of Christ, or of such duties as the Gospel requireth of all Christians in Church-estate."³ Rutherford's dictum, that the two covenants were actually opposed to one another,⁴ went a bit too far; but the New Englanders could

¹See Welde, Answer, p. 27.

²Church Government &c., II. p. 26.

³Ibid., II. p. 28. In this attempt to identify the two covenants, one may see an outworking, within a Calvinist framework, of the ancient longing to believe that all within the visible Church shall be saved; a longing forever frustrated by reality and honesty.

⁴Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 93.

not find a clear alternative. They were quite certain that visible church membership did not, ultimately, flow from invisible union with Christ, but rather required a political combination.¹ But they were still determined to relate the two: Norton, who saw a clear distinction between them, nevertheless insisted that the church covenant was "the external part of the Covenant of Grace, i.e., a part of external Covenant-Grace;"² Hooker maintained that it was included in, commanded by, and warranted by the Gospel, and that it was closely related to the means of grace.³ But whatever it was, the Sacraments, although they only belonged to those within it, yet did not seal it, but sealed only the Covenant of Grace.⁴

Esse or Bene-Esse?

For Independents, there could be no retreat from the principle that it was the church covenant which constituted a particular church; not just the well-being, but the very being of each congregation depended upon it. It was inevitable that

¹Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 76.

²Norton, Responsio, p. 30. Even this identification of the covenants (so close as to be nearly incomprehensible) was not enough to convince Cotton that Norton had not gone too far in his separation of them; in his Preface he demurred against Norton's "discrimen foederis gratiae & ecclesiae" (ibid., sig. a8 recto).

³See Hooker, Survey, I. pp. 70, 78.

⁴See below, on the Sacraments, pp. 174-181; see also Welde, loc. cit.; Norton, loc. cit.; Church Government &c., II. p. 65f.

Presbyterian divines would become aware that this was the New England belief; that they would not be slow in appreciating the implications and raising an outcry; and that this would force from the New Englanders the enunciation of a compromise which might appease their offended brethren.

The early works of the New Englanders made it plain that their churches were constituted by covenant.¹ But it was Lechford who spelled out one thing that this implied:

They hold their Covenant constitutes their Church, and that implyes, we that come to joyne with them, were not members of any true Church whence we came, and that I dare not professe.²

And William Rathband, some two years later (1644), spread the news and sounded the alarm:

But when an expresse vocall covenant is held forth, and with all eagernesse pressed on us, and on all churches as a Divine Ordinance particularly commanded in Scripture, absolutely necessary, essentiall and constitutive to a true church; without which there is no true church. . . . no marvell if . . . it meet with much opposition. . . . This point of church covenant . . . will touch the freehold . . . of all the Churches in the world, if this be the rule to try all Churches by.³

There was, indeed, "much opposition": Samuel Rutherford, Willem Apollonius, Samuel Hudson, and Charles Herle all protested,

¹See Cotton, The True Constitution of A particular visible Church ["Cotton's Catechism"] (1642), p. 1; Church Government &c., I. p. 24, II. p. 5.

²Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 73.

³Rathband, Briefe Narration, pp. 13f, 12.

not only that this church covenant could not be found in the New Testament, and that to require it was 'will-worship,' but even more, that to make it the essence of the constitution of particular churches meant that

then there have beene no visible Churches since the Apostles dayes, nor are there any in the Christian World, this day, save only in New England and some few other places . . .¹

The New Englanders, as has been noted above,² feared Separatism as they feared few other things: they feared being labelled Separatists for political reasons; and they feared becoming Separatists for theological, intellectual and historical reasons. The outcry over their insistence on the church covenant conjured up both fears before them, and drove them to compromise. They advanced the concept of the implicit covenant.

It was not an original idea: it already existed in the political thought of the time,³ and none of the Presbyterian adversaries opposed the idea; Apollonius, in fact, spoke for them all when he said,

We grant . . . that there is a tacit or virtuall Covenant between the members of one and the same externall particular Church: whereby they are obliged to the performance of those mutuall duties, which are required of the members of a visible Church in reference to their particular Church

¹Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 98; see also Apollonius, Consideration, p. 18f; Hudson, Vindication, p. 19f; Herle, Independency, p. 30f.

²See above, p. 114f.

³Locke (who may be regarded as a codifier) said that living and holding property in a community was a tacit assent to its laws; see Randall, Making of the Modern Mind, p. 343.

communion: as that they will be subject to the care and Discipline of their own Pastors, frequent the same publike worship of God, and be ruled by the same law and jurisdiction Ecclesiasticall: by which Covenant they also obtain to themselves right to those things which are peculiar to this particular Church, and the members thereof, and do not belong to other particular Churches.¹

It is difficult to say how much the acceptance of the idea of an implicit church covenant among Presbyterians owed to its proposal by Independents, and how much to their possession of it in the common coin of contemporary thought. It seems likely, however, that the latter was the dominant influence: partly because Presbyterians were not wont to accept novelties propounded to them by Independents; and partly because Presbyterians were alluding to this as an acceptable idea when they were unaware that Independents believed it.²

It is also difficult to say whether New Englanders got the idea more from political or from theological thought; at any rate, it matters little, seeing how closely the two branches of thought were entwined when the colonies began. The colonial

¹Apollonius, Consideration, p. 15, cf. p. 42; Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 13f; Rutherford, Due Right, I. pp. 87, 95, 98f, 116; Hollingworth, Certain Queres, p. 22; Hudson, Vindication, p. 19: "I deny not but mutual consent of persons within such a vicinity, to joyn together constantly in the Ordinances of God under the inspection of such and such officers, is requisite to a particular Congregation."

²It should be noted that it was commonly held by Presbyterians as well as Independents that a covenant was useful in founding a new church or even in restoring a corrupt one: see Rutherford, Due Right, Burton, Vindication, p. 28; Hollingworth, however, objected to the latter view, see Certain Queres, p. 17.

Ministers needed to seek no further than the pages of Amesius for this position.¹ But whatever their sources, from about the mid-1640s we find the New England divines unanimous in their assertion that the church covenant could be either explicit or implicit. Thus they preserved the doctrine that a covenant was the formal cause of each congregation, and yet avoided unchurcing their brethren in Old England (not to mention all the other Reformed Churches in the world).² Those churches could be adjudged to have a proper covenant, whose "members stand bound to walk with God, and one another in the wayes of the worship of Christ, according to the rules of divine policie";³ or, yet more broadly and simply, when church members attend the worship and submit to the ministry, "they declare that by their practices, which others do hold forth by publike profession."⁴ They emphasised that there was no absolute necessity of an express verbal covenant, to make a true church; and therefore that many (if not all) of the English

¹See Ames, Marrow, I.xxxii.15 (quoted above, p. 150).

²See Allin and Shepard, Defence, pp. 13, 107; Noyes, Temple measured, p. 8 (agreeing, here, with his countrymen); Cotton, Defence, II. p. 73; Welde, Answer, p. 24f.

³Stone, Congregational Church, p. 41.

⁴Hooker, Survey, I. p. 47; Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 27; Norton, Responsio, p. 21. Rutherford protested that this meant a man might then be a member of forty churches in a few years' space (Survey, p. 113).

parish churches were true ones (at least in theory). Hooker, followed by his colleague Stone, added Ramistic respectability by saying that "Implicite and Explicite are but adjuncts, and these separable from the essence. And therefore the essence and being of the covenant may consist with either."¹

Sooner or later, this chorus of affirmation was bound to have its effect; and eventually we find recognition in Old England that, at least in their theory, New Englanders were admitting that a true church could be formed by the presence of an implicit covenant, and thus that English churches could be true churches too.² As well as affecting the Presbyterians, the New England attitude was paralleled in some English Independents who required "but a mutuall agreement for joint worship of God";³ many, however, clung to the centrality of "expresse open covenanting" by "real SAINTS uttering in discourse the breathings of the Holy Spirit, and experiences of conversion."⁴ The attitude of this intransigent English sectarianism, which not only unchurched all congregations without a covenant, but also turned this explicit church-contract into a kind of idol, prevented all intercommunion, split up families, and bound men to a single congregation,⁵ goes

¹Hooker, Survey, I. p. 48; cf. Stone, loc. cit.

²See Hudson, An Addition, p. 46.

³Idem.

⁴Nathanael Homes, 'Epistle' in Cotton, Way Cleared, sig. A3 verso.

⁵See Hudson, op. cit., p. 47f.

a long way toward explaining why the Presbyterians did not respond quickly to the New England concession about the implicit covenant; the word itself, however modified, conjured up images of the covenanting sectarians they knew only too well for themselves, who were stealing their members, refusing their fellowship, and consigning them and their parish churches to perdition with a good will. But their belated acknowledgment of what the New Englanders were saying carried its own problem; as William Rathband had already asked, "If so little wil serve, what need such outcries for more . . .?"¹

The 'Material Cause'

If a covenant was, in the terms of contemporary logic, the 'form' (or 'formal cause') of a particular church, what was the 'matter' (or 'material cause')? What sort of people were, in fact, fit to take the covenant? This problem caused nearly as much misunderstanding as, and rather more controversy than, that over the covenant itself. Baylie spoke for many of his party when he said, "I professe this hath alwayes seemed to me their capitall and fundamentall difference . . . it is the great partition wall."² For Congregationalists, only visible saints could possibly be the 'fit matter' of a visible church; they took Paul seriously when he addressed his epistles to church members

¹Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 16.

²Baylie, Dissvative, p. 155.

as 'saints,' 'called,' 'chosen,' 'sanctified'; "for the congregation of Christ is called the Communion of Saints, being sanctified by faith in Christ, and by his word and Spirit."¹ Members must not merely know their catechism, but walk "in a holy course of life; . . . all ignorant and prophane persons" were to be excluded, not just from the Lord's Supper, but from church membership itself.² Far from bringing men into membership in the churches that they might be converted (by the preaching of the Word), they had first to be converted, Christ had first to be "effectually applied" to them, before they could be permitted to become members.³

There are two comments which it seems appropriate to make at this point. The first is that this belief, which in one form or another lies at the basis of Congregationalism, is the result of a too-strenuous application of the doctrine of predestination to the doctrine of the Church. If the elect are conceived of as a peculiar, definite body of people, selected by God from all eternity, whose sanctification follows as irresistibly on their effectual vocation as their vocation does on God's election, then it seems possible, and perhaps even mandatory, to find these

¹Christ on His Throne, p. 57f.

²Idem.

³Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 26; cf. ibid., p. 28; Hooker, Covenant of Grace, p. 17f; Cotton, MS. on doctrine of the Church apud Felt, Ecclesiastical History, p. 391; Field, Of the Church, I.vi.7., apud Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 188.

people and gather them (or rather, allow them to find and gather themselves) into congregations composed exclusively of saints. There would seem to be no earthly reason for including any of the reprobate in these assemblies. The second observation is, that this system in its purity is only possible where there exist other churches to provide these saints, and to provide an alternative for those who cannot, or will not be included in the elect communities. To remove these communities thousands of miles from their sources, and make them the established (and only) churches of a colony (as the New Englanders did), is to make the illusion of elect communities impossible of maintenance. By the very act of their exodus, the New Englanders laid the axe at the tap-root of their system; the inevitable result had to be (as we shall see it was) compromise, and eventual breakdown.¹

One of the clearest signs of the malaise which afflicted the New England system was the popularity there of Augustine's famous saying, "there are a great many sheep without, and a great many wolves within."² Admittedly, this dictum was current among Presbyterians as well; but one great aim of Independency was a

¹"There is a great deal of difference between a Church at the first constitution of it, when possibly they may pick choice members, as they did at first in N.E. when they went over thither, men converted by the Ministry in Old England before they went thither; and a successive Church in after ages, which consist of a new generation . . . I fear the succeeding Churches in N.E. will not prove altogether so pure and eminent for sincerity of grace and holy conversation as their first were; and yet our brethren do not hold that corrupt members in such a successive Church doth unchurch them; and alas that is our condition in this nation" (Hudson, An Addition, p. 46).

²Augustine, homily In Joannem 45.12.

polity which should reverse this situation. The presence of 'hypocrites' in New England congregations was an undeniable and increasingly obvious fact: it demanded explanation, and it forced modification (it must be emphasised here that the blatantly ignorant or scandalous were kept out; but "there is an unworthiness that appeareth not to the eye of men, close hearted hypocrites, which deceive themselves and others . . . they are unblameable in the Churches eye";¹ at least, at the first).

Although it may, at first, have appeared slight, there is a vast difference between the ideal of a church composed only of the elect, and the fact of a church composed only of those who appear to be the elect. To base a church polity on the ideal that only the elect will be members; then to discover and freely admit that a number (which is quite unknown) of the members only appear to be the elect; and yet to continue with the rest of the system as though nothing had changed; this is surely to deceive oneself, if not others. However, it was far too late to pull down the edifice and build on some new foundation (such as the all-inclusive parish system); alterations had to be carried out on the original structure.

Admittance to membership in a church required a double act, for the rejection of the idea of the Catholic Visible Church in the

¹Hooker, Covenant of Grace, p. 58; cf. ibid., p. 59, and his Survey, I. p. 78f; Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 28f; Cotton, New Covenant, pp. 44, 46; Way Cleared, II. p. 40; Of the Holinesse of Church-Members (1650), p. 8.

Presbyterian sense¹ meant that it was not enough simply to profess belief in Christ. No man was a member of a church "till, by his personal and publick profession, he approve himselfe to the Church, and be by them orderly accepted into the fellowship of the Covenant, in an instituted Church."² On the basis of the teaching that it was faith which gave a person the right to the Seals of the Covenant of Grace, Independents believed that the churches were duty bound not to 'set the seals to a blank,' i.e., grant them to a person who did not have this visible sign.³ Against this belief, none of the Presbyterian arguments for admitting men on mere 'formal' profession of faith could prevail: men were not to be admitted in order that they might be converted, but rather vice versa;⁴ and, as Hooker retorted to Rutherford's argument, "to dispute, The Church now gathered hath wicked and ungodly in it, and such as be not visible Saints: Therefore it may be gathered of such, is . . . broad un consequence."⁵ Or, more pithily, "such ill humours as are to be purged out of the body, are not to be drunk into the body."⁶ Christ is the Head of the church, whether mystical or visible, and his members must

¹See above, pp. 111-113.

²Davenport and Hooker, Catechisme, p. 29; cf. Norton, Responsio, p. 23f; Hooker, Survey, I. pp. 60-64.

³See e.g., Bartlet, Model, p. 104.

⁴See Hooker, op. cit., I. p. 31.

⁵Ibid., I. p. 30; III. p. 11.

⁶Cotton, Holinesse, p. 94.

have some affinity to the Head, even if it is only visible (i.e., even if they are "close hearted hypocrites," whose evident spiritual gifts have not issued from justifying faith).¹

Since it had been acknowledged in New England that all members of the church could not and would not be saints in truth, it was agreed that they must be saints in appearance. The reason was simple: a visible church must be made up of visible saints. Those who could not be seen to be the elect, and those who could be seen not to be the elect, were alike excluded. The problem became, how far must the church door be opened, to admit the maximum number of saints and the minimum number of sinners? The church must be, New Englanders decided, not a visible fellowship of saints, but a fellowship of visible saints:

wee receive none as members into the Church, but such as (according to the judgement of charitable Christians) may be conceived to be received of God into fellowship with Christ, the head of the Church.²

In this early expression of the compromise, Cotton still longed after the ideal. But even though he spent page after page of his New Covenant attempting to define how to discern true saints, yet he had to admit that even angels were hard put to tell them from hypocrites of the "close hearted" variety. Colonial divines concluded, with Thomas Hooker, that "it is impossible for man to search into the heart, and to discover it really: it is the

¹See ibid., pp. 25-29.

²Cotton, Way, p. 56.

Prerogative of God to search the heart."¹ Nevertheless, man could search the conduct. And to Baylie's charge, that it was Arminianism to say that all within the church had the grace of Christ, they could reply that they did not say that they did have it (de facto), but that they should have it (de jure); and that therefore they must have it, in "charitable judgment."²

For this was the compromise: not every sinner would be excluded, not every saint included; but the door had been opened until the ideal stopped it, and the result was "the judgment of rationall charity."³ By this, the New Englanders meant that although certain standards were required, yet within these limits (adumbrated below) the conscience did not need to be convinced that true regeneration was present; reason set the limits; as long as people did not appear not to be saints, charity hoped for the best.⁴ This rational charity was both an advantage and a disadvantage to the New Englanders: as it represented a defection from the hidden dream of Congregational Puritanism toward a

¹Hooker, Covenant of Grace.

²See Cotton, Holinesse, p. 47ff.

³"We confesse wee are fearefull as of opening the doore too wide, so of shutting the doores upon any whom God would have us to receive in"; Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 191; cf. Cotton, Way Cleared, I. p. 10f.

⁴See Cotton, Holinesse, p. 1f, cf. pp. 30, 43.

legalistic churchmanship, it was a disadvantage;¹ but in their apologetic toward Presbyterians, it had the advantage of making them look a bit less like Brownists. Hooker showed how the repudiation of the ideal was also the repudiation of the heresy:

They who hold visible Saints in the judgement of charity to be fit Matter, though they be not inwardly sanctified, cannot in reason be thought to maintain onely such, that be effectually called justified, and sanctified, to be the onely matter of a rightly-constituted Church.²

But still the negative side of the ideal fixed the limit of the compromise; for

the pinch of the difference lieth in this, whether such as walk in a way of profaneness, or remain pertinaciously obstinate in some wickednesse, though otherwise professing and practising the things of the Gospel, have any allowance from Christ, or may be counted fit matter, according to the terms of the Gospel, to constitute a Church.³

There was no way to prevent the entrance of those who looked like saints, but were not; but there was a necessity to prevent the entrance of those who could not possibly be saints, even to charity. The church might not be the society of the elect; but

¹"When Puritans begin to content themselves with pious works, arguing from an ability to perform them the certainty of their election, and neglect to make certain of the regeneration itself, when they become good citizens and churchmen without a previous 'experimental knowledge' of an intoxicating and ravishing faith, they do in truth become moralists whose philosophy is based upon social and economic considerations. But by that time they have ceased to be Puritans" (Miller, New England Mind, p. 53).

²Hooker, Survey, I. p. 20; cf. p. 15; Cotton, Holinesse, p. 87.

³Hooker, op. cit., I. p. 20.

it must certainly look like it.¹

Thus members of Christ's body must have some visible influence from the Head; and the feeling grew that marks of holiness, even if spurious, were somehow from Christ, and so qualified men for his visible kingdom.² Conscience abnegated the impossible task of a pre-apocalyptic separation of wheat from tares, and framed such standards as should include, with the wheat, only tares which could pass for wheat themselves:

we desire to see the grace of God shining forth, (at least seemingly, leaving secret things to God) in all we admit into Church fellowship with us . . . ³

Three things were required of those who would enter a congregational church in New England: (1) confession of doctrinal faith; (2) profession of experimental faith; and (3) the testimony of a blameless life.

"Profession of the true religion" had to be fairly thorough,⁴ but applicants' theological weakness did not hinder their entry, "if the whole be in them."⁵ No Presbyterian could carp at this;

¹"The same thing in profession constitutes the visible Church which in its inner nature constitutes the mystical Church, i.e., Faith" (Norton, Responsio, p. 10).

²Hooker, op. cit., I. p. 16; cf. Samuel Rutherford, A Survey of the Survey of that Summe of Church-Discipline Penned by Mr. Thomas Hooker (1658), p. 10.

³Winslow, Hypocrisie, p. 98.

⁴It required a statement, or answers to questions, on the main points, viz.: the Godhead, the Trinity, works, original innocence, the Fall, Redemption, the natures and offices of Christ, faith, the Sacraments, the Church, Resurrection, and the Last Judgment: see Cotton, Coppy, p. 5; cf. his Way, p. 58, and Holinesse, p. 20; Norton, Responsio, p. 3; Noyes, Temple, p. 6; Bartlet, Model, p. 104.

⁵Cotton, Coppy, p. 5.

but from this point, Independents went further than their 'Classical' brethren. "Bare profession" was not enough.

In Scripture, the Lord never "did call for a profession of the Doctrine of faith onely, but especially of the worke of faith;"¹ saving faith was what the Apostles had required. The question used to probe applicants for signs of the Spirit's work in their heart was, "how it pleased God to worke in them, to bring them home to Christ."² Applicants were expected to show that he had worked in them according to the pattern of Covenant theology, by relating how the Law had convinced them of sin, and what Scripture promises had won them to deny self and its righteousness, and rely wholly on Christ's.³ They were not looking for "eminencie of grace," but rather "an heart smitten with sense of sin and need of Christ."⁴

The third requirement for church membership in New England was a "blameless life." It resulted from the belief of Federal theologians that justifying faith led to performance of the Law; and making it a requirement for church membership emphasised that theology's tendency to inculcate the habit of using one's sanctification as a way of proving one's justification and election. The relative importance of this requirement over the first two

¹Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 190.

²Cotton, loc. cit.

³Idem.

⁴Welde, Answer, p. 18; cf. Noyes, Temple, p. 7. They would admit those in whom "wee can discerne the least measure of breathing and panting after Christ, in their sensible feeling of a lost estate" (Cotton, Way, p. 58).

was emphasised by the Synod of 1643, where it was "agreed on gravely,"

That those that are fit matter for a Church, though they are not alwayes able to make large and particular relations of the worke and doctrine of faith, yet must not live in the commission of any known sin, or the neglect of any known dutie.¹

Testimony to this was given by church members who knew the applicant, or, failing that, by letters from his former church or Christian friends.² In spite of all this, however, "experience of a blameless life is not alwayes necessary for admission into the Church:"³ genuine repentance could suffice.

It is obvious that time and defection from the ideal brought a relaxation of the standards: (1) the confession of theological faith could be very weak, and could be elicited by question and answer; (2) the profession of experimental faith and (3) the testimony of a blameless conversation could both, in effect, be reduced to an expression of repentance. In practice, however, this 'way' was strictly applied for many years.

¹Apud M.S. to A.S. (1644), p. 8f; the phrase "live . . . dutie" is echoed in Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 193; cf.: "blameless conversation" (Welde, loc. cit.); "godly conversation" (Cotton, Way, p. 54); "in externâ conversatione puritatis donis absque scandalo" (Norton, Responsio, p. 3; cf. p. 13). Note the agreement with English Independent practice, which required "such a profession of godlinesse, as hath no apparant contradiction in men and womens conversation and walking" (Bartlet, Model, p. 104n).

²See Allin and Shepard, loc. cit.; Cotton, Way, p. 58, and Coppy, p. 5; Norton, loc. cit.

³Allin and Shepard, loc. cit.; cf. Norton, loc. cit.

Presbyterian reaction to New England theory about the material cause of a church was prompt and pointed; it was to some extent mistaken; it was nevertheless responsible for a good deal of the development and clarification of the theory which we have been discussing. Much of the Presbyterian misunderstanding of this colonial theory doubtless arose from the tendency to identify them with the English Separatists who said that Christians must

separate from that Church wherein we are not satisfied by convincing signs of the true faith and grace of every member at their first admission.¹

But it was a mistake to attribute this extreme position to New England as Rathband did (with Rutherford following him):

In persons of age they require first that they be all reall Saints, sincere beleivers, not onely having common gifts, but also saving graces . . .²

Similarly, it was a mistake to credit the New Englanders' theory that all the members should be satisfied in conscience of each new entrant;³ it soon became a dead letter in practice.

Presbyterian objections came from Scripture and from the colonial pamphlets. Scripture texts which referred to church members as "saints" (esp. Rom 1:7) meant, they said, only "the living and gracious members thereof . . . attributed to the whole

¹Baylie, Dissvasive, p. 156; cf. pp. 105f, 157-163, 165f; the Presbyterian belief that this was, in fact, the general English Independent practice was further strengthened by this book; see also Firmin, Of Schism, 'Epistle,' and p. 41.

²Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 5; cf. Rutherford, Due Right, I. pp. 99, 111, 121ff, 126; esp., "Church-membership, by your exposition, is promised to none, but these, who inwardly by true faith are joined to the covenant" (p. 114); Rutherford, Survey, p. 39 margin.

³See Hollingworth, Certain Queres, p. 18.

Church . . . indefinitely, because of these some."¹ Matthew 22:1-14, far from teaching that the servants should have excluded the man wanting a wedding garment, proves that the final distinguishing was to be left to the Lord;² II Timothy 3:5 refers, not to subtle hypocrites, but to the "openly scandalous and flagitious."³ To warrant their own contention, they argued from many texts (e.g., Matt. 22:14, 13:25, 25:32, 13:47, Rom. 9:21) that "in the best Churches of the Scripture, we have too many bad members."⁴ And as for the New England way of selecting only good members (as described by Hooker), Rutherford was unimpressed: "M. H. referres all to the judgement of charity, which is a meere doubting uncertain way of finding the true Church," he said, and added, "there is not a word of any such judgement of charity in the Scripture."⁵ They usually clinched their arguments with Apostolic example:

¹Baylie, Dissvative, p. 166; Rutherford, Survey, pp. 83-91; Hollingworth, Examination, p. 9.

²See Rutherford, Survey, p. 35.

³See Baylie, op. cit., p. 170f.

⁴Ibid., p. 165f, cf. p. 170f.

⁵Rutherford, Survey, pp. 20, 27; if this is the way members must be admitted to the church, he said, "then the visible Church hath all its essence and nature founded upon judgment that may erre, and upon no certain rule of the word" (ibid., p. 40).

Will any of our Brethren be content to admit their members upon so slender tearms as Philip or any of the Apostles did require of their new converts? Will the profession that Iesus is the Christ, or such a confession of faith as Simon Magus and all the people of Samaria men and women, after a little labour of Philip among them, could make, be an evident and convincing signe of regeneration?¹

Presbyterians also based their objections to the concept of "fit matter" on what they read in the New England writings of hypocrites within the churches;² their way, opined Rutherford, "makes not a whit cleaner visible Church then our way."³ Furthermore, their way was heretical: not only did its fruit smell like that of Anabaptism and Brownism, but at its root it was even worse:

none of them [the Arminians] ever said that this sanctifying and saving grace must be in every person before they can bee admitted members of any Church; For this is that grosse errour which the Independents have learned not so much from Arminius as Socinus, to put all men unconverted without the Church . . . ⁴

¹Ibid., p. 173; cf. Firmin, Of Schism, p. 41: "Was every Member at his admission into the Church of the Apostles times, called to give account of the Work of Grace in his heart? and how is that proved?" Cf. Hollingworth, loc. cit.; Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 7; Rutherford, Survey, p. 3f; p. 11: "the judgement of the Church is abstracted both from the eternall election and the eternall reprobation of Magus, and from the reall conversion or the reall non-conversion of Magus."

²See Baylie, Dissvative, p. 166; Hudson, Vindication, p. 249, and his An Addition, p. 43.

³Rutherford, Survey, p. 5.

⁴Baylie, op. cit., p. 167 (the passage continues, "that in this condition, they may be converted by the preaching of private men, and if by Pastors yet by their Preaching, not as Pastors, but as private men dealing with those who are none of their Flock, but without the Church"). By tracing one of their doctrines back to Fausto Sozzini, Baylie was classing the New Englanders with those who denied, among other things, the Trinity, the divine nature of Christ, and the Atonement.

The New England Way, Presbyterians maintained, confused what was required in foro ecclesiae with what was required in foro Dei; sufficient for membership in the visible Church were "knowledge and belief of the main points of the Christian faith, and professed subjection thereunto."¹ The two systems agreed that all must be made to come to the preaching of the Word; but the New Englanders did not believe that this involved making them all members. Only the elect, or those who seemed to the judgment of charity to be the elect, were to be gathered into the church. The slight, but fundamental difference between Presbyterians and Independents at this point is illustrated by this quotation from Rutherford:

Who are they that are fit matter of themselves in se & intrinsece, who have due right to Ordinances, Seals? we say, onely sincere real professors. But the question is, Who are fit matter, having right to Ordinances in the account of Rulers and the Church, whether they have true right or not?²

The concept of fit matter (in the Independent sense) existed in Presbyterianism; but it never became the standard for its admission policy.³ Perhaps the crux of the Presbyterian

¹Hudson, Vindication, p. 246; cf. Rutherford, Survey, p. 15: "if they who leave the wayes of Paganisme, Judaisme, Popery, and the wayes of sin, professe they are willing to be the disciples of Christ, if the profession be not grossely and knownly hypocritically, and their coming in be not for by-ends and to betray the cause, but morally ingenuous and negatively sincere, the Church is to receive such, and is not forbidden to admit them as members, whether to the knowledge of the Church they be reall converts or not reall converts."

²Ibid., p. 125; cf. p. 80f; his Due Right, I. p. 248.

³See Rutherford, Survey, p. 128.

disagreement with this idea is best expressed by Miller:

Presbyterians were profoundly skeptical of this rule of reason and love. They thought it safer to gather everybody into the fold by the rule of force and leave the selection to God.¹

Covenant and Sacraments

The Seals of the Covenant

A striking feature of New England Covenant doctrine was its relation to the doctrine of the Sacraments. They agreed with Presbyterians that "a Sacrament is an outward and visible Signe and Seal of the covenant of grace."² It was but a short step for some of the New England divines to add that

the Seale presupposes all those to be in the covenant of grace, that have the seals: for the seals doe not make the Covenant, but establish the Covenant: there is no seal put to a blank . . .³

Nevertheless, the Covenant of Grace, per se, could give no more right to the Seals of the New Covenant than it had given to those of the Old; it was confederation with the people of God which gave the right to the Seals.⁴

When Presbyterians read such New England dicta as, "one end and use of the Sacrament is to Seale Church communion unto the

¹Miller, New England Mind, p. 453; cf. Rutherford, Survey, pp. 32f, 147.

²Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 38f; cf. Church-Government &c., I. p. 12; Norton, Responsio, p. 32f; Welde, Answer, p. 27; Bartlet, Model, p. 102f; Hudson, Vindication, pp. 19, 223; Hooker, Covenant of Grace, p. 10; Hooker, Survey, I. p. 58 (misn. 59).

³Hooker, Covenant of Grace, p. 17.

⁴See Hooker, Survey, III. p. 24f.

members of churches,"¹ they leapt to the conclusion that their brethren were saying that the church covenant was

that Covenant which is sealed by the Sacraments, and for the sealing and ratifying of which the Sacraments were principally ordained of God, and therefore to be administered only to such as are first entred into this Covenant, as seales thereof . . .²

But New Englanders specifically denied that this was meant:

Sacraments are not signs and seals confirming this Church covenant, nor by any means instituted principally for its ratification . . .³

Nevertheless, the Seals could still only be applied to members of particular congregations; New Englanders had confuted, to their own satisfaction, the Presbyterian argument for a Universal Visible Church, whose members, although not in any congregation, had a right to the Seals; therefore,

seeing the Churches under the Gospel, are Congregationall, and that Baptisme and the Lords Supper, belongs onely to the Churches, it will follow that . . . Baptisme and the Lords Supper, being Church-priviledges, belongs onely to the particular Churches, and their seede.⁴

This was the primary reason for limiting the Seals to members of particular churches. The second was that official pastoral power, which was that power exerted by a Minister in such acts of his (particular) office as admissions, censures,

¹Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 43; cf. Church-Government &c., p. 65f; Welde, Answer, p. 27.

²Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 19f; cf. Hudson, Vindication, p. 222.

³Norton, Responsio, p. 32.

⁴Church-Government &c., II. p. 63.

the Sacraments and 'official' preaching, could only be exercised toward those who had bound themselves to that Minister by a particular covenant.¹ The third reason for baptising only church members shows clearly the influence of the doctrine of the church covenant. The New England divines insisted that Baptism followed church membership, in spite of strenuous Presbyterian objections that it was Baptism which, in fact, made one a member: "by Baptism we are admitted into the Church."² They attacked the Presbyterian position not just because it inferred the existence of a Catholic Visible Church, challenged the independence of particular churches, and could lead to the inclusion of the "profane multitude," but especially because it made the church covenant unnecessary.³

¹See Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 43: "to administer the Sacrament is an act of Church powr and priviledge, which powr ordinary Teaching Officers have not out of their own congregations." See also Hooker, Survey, I. pp. 289-296, esp. p. 290; III. p. 10: "if an Officer have no authority to require him to receive the seal no more hath he power to require the Officer to give the seal" (all italics). Cf. Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 153: "no Christian can expect by the appointment of God, to partake in the seales, till he hath joyned himselfe in Church-fellowship, and in the call of the Minister." They also held that no one was capable of the Sacraments who was not also capable of being censured; non-members were not capable of the latter (since the officers had no authority over them); ergo. See Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 43; Cotton, Way, p. 76. Rutherford's position was that "it is true, the relation of Pastor and free people is founded upon a tacite Covenant, but this Covenant is made in Baptisme" (Due Right, I. p. 127); yet on the next page he seems to be saying that this relation is established by the Pastor's election to a church.

²Hudson, Essence, p. 35; cf. Apollonius, Consideration, p. 19, quoting the Leyden Professors.

³See idem.

The New Englanders attacked the idea that Baptism made men members of the church, saying that it was an opinion of Anabaptists and Papists:

But we do not believe that Baptisme doth make men Members of the Church, nor that it is to be Administered to them that are without the Church, as the way and meanes to bring them in, but to them that are within the Church, as a seal to confirme the Covenant of God unto them.¹

It was a seal of God's Covenant; but it was given only to those who were in church covenant. The arguments for this were succinctly summarised by Norton in his Responsio. Logically, the New England position was based on this dichotomy: "Either the Baptised must first be members before Baptism, or they are made members by Baptism";² the latter was rejected: because, since Baptism was given to the church, those outside the church are incapable of it;³ and because the necessary promise (of faith and obedience) which precedes Baptism cannot be authoritatively required of non-members.⁴ Scripturally, he said the New Englanders argued from both Testaments: from the Old Testament;

From the analogy of Circumcision, the family of Abraham, Jews, Proselytes Is. 56. were of the Church before they were circumcised; ergo Christians must be members of

¹Church-Government &c., I. p. 12.

²Norton, Responsio, p. 33; his third alternative, that the baptised remain non-members, was added for the sake of logical completeness, not for serious consideration.

³See ibid., p. 34; cf. Church-Government &c., I. p. 12.

⁴See Norton, op. cit., p. 32; Hooker, Survey, I. p. 59; cf. Bartlet, Model, p. 58: "Neither is Baptisme the forme of a church, or the way and meanes now left to bring men into the church, but a seale of Confirmation rather to those that are already joyned to some particular Church of Christ." Cf. ibid., p. 9.

the Church before they are baptised.¹

From the New Testament, he argued, we know that the Apostles must have observed the command that Christ gave them (Matt. 28:19), to make disciples before baptising:² therefore they gathered men into a Christian church before baptising them; although in some cases this was not necessary, as "it is certain that many of the baptised were members of the Jewish Church, before Baptism." And finally, to cover any cases wherein the Apostles might not have observed the rule, Norton argued that they had had fulness of power and direct guidance by the Spirit; which Ministers now did not.³

The basis of the Presbyterian objections to this idea was the concept that the only covenant sealed by Baptism was the Covenant of Grace, and that by Baptism one became a member of the Catholic Visible Church, before (or even without) becoming a member of a particular congregation.⁴ Dealing with the

¹Norton, op. cit., p. 34; this is followed by the explanation, "from the analogy of civil political society, the privileges proper to which societies, are not conferred on any but their members." Cf. Ball, Tryall, p. 36f. See also above, pp. 126-130.

²Norton, op. cit., p. 35; cf. Cotton, Way, p. 82; since a disciple was a scholar in Christ's school (the church), and the command in Matt. 28 was to make disciples before baptising, the inference was that the church must be gathered before any could be baptised. But a more likely translation would be, 'make disciples by baptising,' using the reading as in BD, and referring αὐτοὺς to τὰ ἔδωκεν (to refer it to "disciples," and translate μαθητεύουσι by "teach" was Anabaptist exegesis); see A. B. Bruce in loc.

³See Norton, Responsio, p. 35f; Cotton (in the Way) gave the same points; his Epistolers disagreed with him on special Apostolic power, etc.

⁴See Hudson, Vindication, p. 19; Rutherford, Due Right, I. pp. 95, 117; 125: "The Seale of Baptisme and a profession of the truth, is that which maketh one a member of the visible Church." Cf. Ball, Tryall, p. 19; for the importance to the Presbyterian concept of the idea of a general Visible Church, see ibid., pp. 59, 66.

Independent logic, Rutherford split the dichotomy noted above, and affirmed both halves: before Baptism, candidates are members of the Church (that is, of the mystical Church; they are assumed to be so, by their profession of faith); and by Baptism they are made members of the Church (that is, of the visible Church).¹

Baptism is given, not to the visible, but to the mystical Church.² There was no restipulation required of the candidate for Baptism, except profession.³

Then the Independent Scriptures for this opinion were dealt with. Circumcision was the sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace; and this was the only Covenant which Abraham and his family were in.⁴ As for the New Testament, Presbyterians could

¹See Rutherford, op. cit., II. pp. 211, 186, 195f, 258.

²See ibid., I. p. 249; cf. I., pp. 122, 195f, II. p. 185f; also his Survey, pp. 69ff, 92f: it is faith which gives a right to the Seals; profession only signifies it; the Seals thus properly belong to the invisible Church. It is obvious that only logically does the fact that Baptism was given to the Church mean that the Church must exist before Baptism; it was the ingrained habit of logical thought which made this a problem to these divines.

³No 'contract' was necessary: either to unite the society (that was implicit in Baptism); to confer authority (Ministers were before churches, with their authority direct from Christ); or to establish conditions (Laws were already laid down in Scripture).

⁴See Ball, Tryall, p. 66f. Rutherford pointed out that Abraham and his family were "in Church-state" before the Covenant in Genesis 17, which proved that that Covenant did not inchurch them; but it is not clear how he could go on to say that Church-membership is not required for Baptism or Circumcision, adding, on top of that, that Baptism is the "seale of our entry into the visible Church"; see Due Right, II. p. 198.

not see even a hint of the Independent approach in the practice of the Apostles; rather, they saw that the Apostles first baptised such as believed, and then formed them into churches.¹ For them, Baptism either preceded² or accompanied³ admission into church-estate; it never followed it. Peter, Philip, Ananias and Paul baptised men

because they were disciples, beleaved, gladly received the Word, had received the holy Ghost, were called, and the promise was made to them, and to their seed, even to all them that were afarre off.⁴

To the argument that some who seemed not to have been inchurched prior to Baptism were actually already in the Jewish Church, Presbyterians answered that this was not proved, and that if it were, membership in the Jewish Church had nothing to do with Christian Baptism; that the Apostles had had special inspiration and guidance did not mean that what they had done was not to be a rule for those who followed them; that they had had universal jurisdiction was no proof that the same was true of such as Philip and Ananias; and concerning the "probability" that those (like Lydia and the Gaoler) baptised by the Apostles had been previously, or were first made, members of a visible church, Rutherford remarked tartly, "it is hard to build a new Church government

¹See Ball, Tryall, p. 40ff.

²See ibid., p. 54.

³See Rutherford, loc. cit.

⁴Ball, op. cit., p. 59.

contrary to the doctrine of the reformed Churches upon probabilities."¹

If, as the New Englanders said, there was a similarity between the Presbyterian doctrine of Baptism and that of the Anabaptists and Papists (in teaching that it was Baptism which constituted the Visible Church), yet there was a danger that their own teaching could slip over into the other extreme: for, argued Rutherford

while you would seeme to refute Papists, who vainely teach that Sacraments doe conferre grace ex opere operato, by the deed done; yet doe you make the Sacrament but a naked signe, and take part with Arminians and Socinians, whose very arguments in expresse words you use. . . . You say, Sacraments doe not make a thing that was not, but confirme a thing that was before; you can have no other meaning then to deny all causalitie and all reall exhibition of grace in the Sacraments . . .²

This conflict between the Independent and Presbyterian doctrine of Baptism shows, in practice, a difference between the 'gathered' and the 'catholic' ideas of the Church. It is significant that in New England, where a 'gathered' church became the 'established' Church, the baptismal practice ran into difficulty very early, and as time went on, came to adopt some features which can be regarded as 'catholic.' These are summed up in the 'Half-Way Covenant.'

¹Rutherford, op. cit., II. p. 197; cf. p. 188f; Ball, loc. cit. et seqq.

²Rutherford, op. cit. II. p. 217.

The Half-Way Covenant

How could Congregationalists reconcile their doctrine of "fit matter" with their practice of infant Baptism? This was something which Presbyterians found difficult to comprehend. As they saw it, in spite of their Baptism, the infants of these Independents were not church members, for "none are in your Church-covenant, but believers, of whose sound conversion you are satisfied in conscience."¹ To Presbyterians, it seemed that this made infant Baptism quite pointless.²

For Presbyterians, infants were entitled to Baptism because they participated in the federal holiness which distinguished Christian from heathen nations, and gave them a right to the ordinances of the Gospel. Neither the parents' wickedness ("under the new Covenant, the sonne doth not beare the iniquity of the father"³) nor their non-membership in a particular church, could deprive children of Baptism,

if so be they be borne of a Christian stock, and baptized parents, who professe the faith of the Christian Church, the doctrine and worship of the Covenant; and by those parents, or those that are neere to them, under whose power they are, be according to the accustomed order of our Churches offered to Baptisme.⁴

¹Ibid., I. p. 102; cf. p. 111.

²See ibid., I. p. 122, margin.

³Apollonius, Consideration, p. 88.

⁴Ibid., p. 86, cf. pp. 84-87; Baylie, Dissvative, p. 119; Rutherford, op. cit., I. pp. 95, 117, 125, II. 259f, and Survey, p. 121; Jus Divinum, pp. 21, 32 (they seem closer to the Independents). See W.M. Campbell, The Triumph of Presbyterianism (1958), p. 91.

One was baptised, not into a particular church, but into the communion of the "Church Universall and Catholike."¹ The children of excommunicates were in the covenant, and entitled to the Seals, whereas the children of heathen were not.²

New England Congregationalists (contrary, I feel, to the logic of their position) retained infant Baptism; they could not, therefore, do without the doctrine of federal holiness; but this holiness could not be national. They retained infant Baptism because orthodoxy and Scripture required it, even though they knew perfectly well that "saving grace is never unfallably communicated to all the posterity of believing parents."³ Nevertheless, the children of church members were federally holy; they were "under covenant by nature, providence, and appointment from God and reason."⁴ This covenant, however, was not that of the nation with God,⁵ but that of the parents with their local church; specifically, a child's right to Baptism depended on its parents' right to the Lord's Supper.⁶ It did not depend on any real faith or regeneration in

¹Apollonius, op. cit., p. 85; Rutherford, Survey, p. 96f.

²See Rutherford, Due Right, II. pp. 263, 265.

³Hooker, Covenant of Grace, p. 42.

⁴Hooker, Survey, I. p. 68.

⁵As it was in, say, Apollonius and Rutherford.

⁶See Cotton, Way, pp. 81, 87. One parent was sufficient.

the parents, but solely on this external qualification.¹

However much the New England divines affirmed that the infants of parents in church covenant were church members themselves (and that, before their Baptism²), the fact remained that when they reached an age of responsibility, they had to satisfy the church of their faith and conversation, and take the covenant, exactly as if they were non-members; furthermore, if they failed to do so, they remained as non-members.³ This, as we have mentioned, led Presbyterians to assume that baptised infants were not actually church members, in New England polity; but it led to more than this. As early as 1644, this practice provoked William Rathband to comment,

What if upon examination they prove neither cōvincingly gracious, as wanting expected evidences, nor yet openly scandalous, as being over-powred with Gods ordinances, and good education and government? what shall become of them then, admitted as members to the Lords Supper they shall not be; and excommunicated, I trow, they cannot justly be; By this rule they must remain in a middle condition, neither of the Church, nor without the Church; And what warrant have we for this?⁴

¹The only possible exception was a child under Christian guardianship, and even that was debated for a long time; see Cotton, Way, p. 88; Norton, Responsio, p. 37f. On federal holiness, see also Cotton, op. cit., pp. 81-88; Hooker, Survey, III. pp. 13, 18; Davenport & Hooke, Catechisme, p. 32f; Hooker, Covenant of Grace, pp. 35, 39, 56; Eliot, Christian Commonwealth, p. 3.

²See Hooker, Covenant of Grace, p. 64.

³See Davenport & Hooke, op. cit., p. 31f; cf. Baylie, op. cit. p. 164.

⁴Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 20. Rutherford indignantly asked them how they could unchurch baptised Christians, not for any scandal, but only "because they cannot give evidence of reall conversion, yet for 60. or 80. years, and to their dying day, are no more Church-members then Pagans?" (Survey, p. 57; cf. p. 139).

Thus, as much as thirteen years beforehand, from across the ocean, a Presbyterian foresaw the inevitable result of this polity: the "Half-Way Covenant." It was a danger inherent in the system: godly men, despairing of reformation in an 'ungodly' Church which mixed true and false 'matter,' had emigrated to find liberty to gather churches of the godly, the elect, the truly regenerate. But once their churches were established, not only could they find no reliable means of detecting true regeneration, but also, by retaining infant Baptism they weakened their system at its very foundations. The baptised second generation remained, in the majority of cases, 'unconverted'; having no regeneration to report, they could not enter into the covenant.¹ In thus barring their children from the Lord's Table, the first settlers discovered that they were barring their grandchildren from Baptism, and hence from the church and from "Ecclesiasticall supervision." As early as 1634, we find a grandfather in Dorchester offering his grandchild for Baptism in his own right, since its parents were not professors;² and by 1644 the practice had increased to the point where churches were seeking counsel on "whether a childe may be baptized by right of his Grand-fathers Covenant."³

Beginning in 1657, and concluding with the Synod at Boston in March, 1662, the majority of Elders and Messengers approved

¹Rutherford noted this: see ibid., p. 52f.

²See Felt, Ecclesiastical History, p. 203 (it was accepted).

³Cotton, Way, p. 106.

a compromise. The proposal that baptised, informed, non-scandalous but 'unregenerate' persons might be admitted to full communion was rejected; it was decreed, instead, that they might become subordinate members, owning the covenant, and thus in their own right entitle their children to Baptism. So in spite of their original ideals, the New England divines agreed in practice with Jonathan Mitchell that

The Lord hath not set up Churches onely that a few old Christians may keep one another warm while they live, and then carry away the Church into the cold grave with them when they dye.¹

This compromise was violently opposed by a minority of some of the most learned and godly, split the churches (in the Massachusetts colony especially), and became known as "large Congregationalism," or, in unconscious irony, the "New Church" way.² One of the best comments on it is made by Roland H. Bainton:

The Halfway Covenant was an incongruous combination of two conceptions of the church, as an ark of salvation comprising all in the parish, and as a community of the saints, composed only of the converted. The whole compromise was swept away by the revival of Jonathan Edwards.³

¹[Jonathan Mitchell and Richard Mather], A Defence of the Answer and Arguments of the Synod (1664), p. 45. "Besides the nature of Political, as well as Christian Society, doth utterly forbid to deny the Priviledges of fellowship to such Members as are found without scandal" (John Norton [trans.], A Copy of the Letter Returned by the Ministers of New-England to Mr. John Dury [Cambridge, New England, 1664], p. 5); the Half-Way Covenant was seen by some New Englanders as an ecumenical step forward, since now the children of professing parents could be baptised; this, it was claimed, brought the New England churches more into line with the Reformed Churches (see ibid., preface).

²Cf. Ball's title, A Tryall of the New-Chvrch Way in New-England &c.

³R. H. Bainton, 'Jonathan Mitchell,' DAB, XIII, 56; cf. Simpson, Puritanism, p. 36.

Because of its covenant ideal of 'fit matter,' New England Congregationalism stood bound to "Godliness in the Power of it"; but second-generation Christians rarely display a 'ravishing faith.' This can be an inconvenience for any Church; but in New England, where the whole rising generation was called "a Formal Generation of Professors," it was disastrous. Increase Mather, mourning (in 1700) the decline of the 'matter' (which he blamed on the Half-Way Covenant), gave a startling revelation of how the wheel had nearly come full circle:

If the begun Apostacy should proceed as fast the next thirty years as it has done these last, surely it will come to that in New England (Except the Gospel it self Depart with the Order of it) that the most Conscientious People therein, will think themselves concerned to gather Churches out of Churches.¹

¹Increase Mather, The Order of the Gospel (1700), p. 11; apud Dexter, Congregationalism, p. 488. An excellent brief summary of the Half-Way Covenant is found in Dexter, pp. 467-476.

V. THE KEYS

This controversy touching the first subject of the power of the Keyes, is of all other of greatest worth and waight . . .

--Hooker, Survey, I. p. 192

Introduction

There were few teachings so important to the Congregational position as a whole as was that of the first subject of the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and few which caused as much dissension between them and the Presbyterian divines. But it is also true that this was one of the most confused and confusing areas of debate; while (to modern eyes at least) the proofs adduced by both sides in this argument seem to rest upon the least substantial of foundations.

The Controversy in Print

The printed controversy had two stages, divided by the publication of Samuel Rutherford's The Due Right of Presbyteries in 1644. Previous to that time, the topic had been raised on each side, and some views exchanged.¹ But some time between 1640 and 1643, an anonymous manuscript began circulating in English Independent circles, entitled "The Way of the Churches of Christ in New England." Rutherford, who came to England for the Assem-

¹See Gillespie, Assertion; Herle, Independency; Church-Government &c.; all passim.

bly in 1643, got possession of a copy of it. Realising its importance as a succinct statement of the New England polity, and as an exemplar to the English Independents, he published a lengthy book refuting it; nearly thirty-seven per cent. of his work deals with the keys and related issues.¹ It had scarcely been published when Cotton's The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven (devoted almost entirely to this subject) appeared; it rapidly became (and has remained to the present day) one of the two classics of early New England Congregational literature.² In the following year (1645), the former manuscript treatise, The Way of the Churches, was published, principally to allow it to defend itself against Rutherford's attack on it in the Due Right; it was then revealed that its author was John Cotton. Hard on its heels came Baylie's famous Dissvasive from the Errours of the Time, with his strictures on Cotton's novelties, as gathered from the published Keyes and the manuscript "Way";³ and Daniel Cawdrey's Vindiciae Clavium,⁴ which pointed out to Cotton, "1. The weak-

¹It also commented on passages in Church-Government &c., and Robinson's Justification of Separation and The People's Plea, among other works. For passages on the keys, see Rutherford, Due Right, I. pp. 1-49, 76f, 127-251, 272-276, 289-354, II. pp. 204-210, 266-323.

The same year saw publication of Ball's Tryall (on the nine questions in Church-Government &c.), Rathband's Briefe Narration and Welde's Answer thereto, and Mather and Thompson's Modest & Brotherly Answer to Herle's book on Independency (1643); all of which refer to this question.

²The other is Thomas Hooker's Survey.

³This is the most probable interpretation, as Baylie's work seems to have been written in 1644; see the Dissvasive, p. 91.

⁴Not listed among his works by J. H. Overton in DNB, s.v.; but credited to him in DAPEL, IX, 358.

nesse of his proofes. 2. The Contradictions to himselfe, and others."¹

After this, the controversy dragged on nearly to the Restoration; and the interaction between opposing principles, and between principle and practice (especially in New England) became more and more complex. There were some comments on this subject by James Noyes in The Temple measured, in 1646. In 1647 came Richard Mather's Reply to Mr. Rutherford;² in 1648, Allin and Shepard's Defence of the Answer,³ Hooker's Survey, and Cotton's The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared (which replied to attacks on the Keyes and the Way by Baylie's Dissvasive, Cawdrey's Vindiciae, and Rutherford's Due Right). In 1651⁴ Cawdrey retaliated with The Inconsistencie of the Independent way (answering Cotton's Way Cleared and reviewing Hooker's Survey); and in 1655, Baylie published his Dissuasive . . . vindicated (replying to Cotton's Way Cleared). In 1658, John Owen published (Cotton's) A Defence of Mr. John Cotton against Cawdrey's Inconsistencie, and Rutherford brought out his Survey of the Survey of that Summe of Church-Discipline Penned by Mr. Thomas Hooker, which may fairly be said to have marked the end of this controversy.

¹See Cawdrey, Vindiciae, title-page.

²A defence of his and Tompson's Modest & Brotherly Ansvver (to Herle's Independency) from Rutherford's strictures thereon in his Due Right. Some references to this topic are also found in Ellis's Vindiciae Catholicae and Bartlet's Model, also of 1647.

³Defending the "Nine Questions" (see Church-Government &c.) from the attacks of Ball's Tryall; reprinted, 1653, under Shepard's name only, as A Treatise of Liturgies, Power of the Keyes &c. Norton's Responsio, of this year, also refers to the keys.

⁴Hudson's Vindication, 1650, has some germane material.

The Texts in Question

This was a controversy which turned almost entirely on the interpretation of two texts, Matthew 16:13f, and 18:17f.¹ As familiar as they are, they deserve to be quoted here, since so much depends on them:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 16:19 was the key verse, and on two questions raised thereby there arose the controversy with which this chapter has to do. They were: what are the keys of the kingdom of heaven? and to whom are they given? These questions have always proved so difficult to answer, that some modern interpreters have preferred to solve the problem by regarding this text as a later addition;² but this option was not open to seventeenth century divines. They had to take the texts as they stood; at the same time, they had to interpret them in such a way as utterly to dis-

¹See above, pp. 32-44.

²According to Oscar Cullmann (Peter: Disciple - Apostle - Martyr, trans. Floyd V. Filson [London, 1953], pp. 161-169), this is a view whose first important exponent was H. J. Holtzmann, in the late nineteenth century (see his Die Synoptiker [1st ed., "Hand-Commentar zum Neuen Testament"; Tübingen, 1892], ad loc.); it was popular in the early part of this century among such scholars as Johannes Weiss, Klostermann, Dibelius, B. S. Easton, Goguel, etc. It lost favour between the World Wars, but returned with Bultmann.

inherit the Pope from any share in them; and yet they had to derive from them the authorisation for all the ecclesiastical power given by Christ to his Church.

The Battle of the Keys

The Way of the Churches

Sometime between 1640 and 1645 (probably in 1642 or 1643), a manuscript treatise came over by ship from New England, entitled "The Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England, Measured by the Golden Reed of the Sanctuary." It "went up and downe in the darke"¹ for several years, was imperfectly copied,² was used by English Independents, and, in 1643 or 1644, came into the hands of Samuel Rutherford in an anonymous copy.³ The first words he would have read were these:

That ths Church which Christ in his Gospel hath instituted, and to which he hath committed the keys of his kingdom, the power of binding and loosing, the tables and seales of the Covenant, the Officers and censures of his Church, the administration of all his publick Worship and Ordinances, is, Coetus fidelium, a Communion of Saints, a Combination of faithfull godly men, meeting for that end, by common and joynt consent, into one Congregation; which is commonly called a particular visible Church. For the Church to the which Christ committed the power of binding and loosing, was a company of such (as whereof Peter was one,) Beleevers professing that faith on Christ, whereon (as on a rock) the Church is built, Mat. 16. 18, 19. and such as unto whom Peter, or any brother offended, might (in due order) till [sic] the offence which any brother had given him & persisted in, Mat. 18. 17.⁴

¹Cawdrey, Vindiciae, p. 2.

²Cotton, Way, sig. A2 verso et seq.

³It is not certain whether all copies were anonymous. Rutherford, at any rate, gave no indication that he knew that John Cotton was the author.

⁴Cotton, Way, p. 1f.

As he turned more pages of the manuscript, he would find, in the company of many orthodox sentiments, more and more passages which supported and restated the same basic proposition: that the keys of government had been given to the church: that (as Rutherford thence inferred) authority and rule in Christ's Church had been handed over to the rude mass of the people. It was, of course, nothing new for Independents to say that each local church had authority for government within itself; it was not even new for some of the more extreme sectaries to say that the people should have all power of government. But what moved Rutherford to print was that an anonymous (and therefore all the more authoritative-seeming) tract, giving a full description of New England church practice, and consequently having enormous influence among English Independents and others, seemed to favour the unthinkable extreme of Brownism, of ecclesiastical democracy. Here was a workable, working pattern for church government, not a mere theory; it showed some similarities with the Reformed church government in Scotland (to which it was a not inconsiderable rival); but it spoiled all, and must have seemed to Rutherford to threaten with Morellian anarchy the reform afoot in the English Church, by this simple statement:

In the Gospel of Christ, the power of the Keys is given to the Church, to Peter, not as an Apostle, nor as an Elder, but as a Profest beleever; in the name of believers, and upon occasion of the profession of his faith, Matth. 16.16 to 19. whereupon the binding and loosing (which is the power of the Keys) is attributed to the whole Church, Mat. 18.17,18.¹

¹Ibid., p. 27; the passage also states that while laymen may not preach or administer the Sacraments, they may elect officers, "and by imposition of hands . . . dedicate them to God, and to the publique service of his Church."

As we shall see, Rutherford put the worst interpretation on these passages in the "Way," and attacked the New England churches as being "democraticall." Democracy, or Morellianism¹ in church polity (whether theoretical or practical) was regarded as one of the more dangerous heresies of the age. But as a dispassionate reading shows, this work of Cotton's was not Morellian in either respect. This deserves a brief discussion, before we pass on to some of the reasons for Rutherford's mistake.

It seems likely, on internal evidence, that Cotton's manuscript was written to inform sympathetic English divines about the New England way; to be, as it were, an exemplar and aid to them in their attempt to persuade their countrymen that the way most "tending to the Reformation of the Churches in England" was the way on which the New Englanders had set out.² It was to be a charter and plan of action for non-conformists, with answers to objections likely to be raised by Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and extreme Brownists. It was also an attempt to appeal to all who favoured the Congregational way in any of its variations as the way for the Church of England; it therefore contained expressions which would satisfy both those who held a high view of the power of the brethren and those who held a high view of the power of the officers. To the former, it offered such statements as that quoted just above; to the latter, such as the following; in denying that fraternal ordination implied that officers were not receiving their power from Christ, Cotton said:

Neither will it follow from hence (as some object) that

¹See Appendix B.

²See Cotton, Way, pp. 113-116.

if the Elders received their ordination from the Church, then they should execute their office in the Churches name, or that then they may be more or lesse diligent in their office at the Churches appointment, or that then the Church hath a Lord-like power over them, or that then the Elders must receive their errand from the Church, as an Ambassador doth from him from whom he receiveth his Commission; or that then the Church, in defect of all Officers, may performe all duties of their Officers, (as to administer the Sacraments, and the like.)¹

If this passage makes it plain that Cotton was no ecclesiastical democrat in his theory, there were others which should have made it equally clear that he did not permit democracy in practice, as:

All such disorder is easily and timely prevented by the Elders, who have power from Christ to restraints any mans speech, whilst another is speaking; and to cut off any mans speech that groweth either impertinent or intemperate.²

But Rutherford chose to disregard the interpretation which the "Way" put upon its own theories and practices, and arraigned the New England way for both theoretical and practical Morellianism. But it is unlikely that this policy was entirely deliberate; much of it had to do with the fact that the Scottish divine nearly always read Cotton's statements about the keys of church government in terms of the traditional interpretation of them in Reformed (and even Scholastic) theologians (rather than in the terms in which the "Way" defined them). And it is true that to have given those keys to the body of church members would have been as inconceivable as surrendering the Royal sceptre and seals to the common rabble; it would have been simple madness. We must, therefore, examine the Reformed doctrine of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and compare it with that developing in New

¹Ibid., p. 44; cf. p. 27.

²Ibid., p. 100; see also Appendix B, and below, p. 230f.

England, before we can fully understand the nature of their disagreement.

The Keys Defined

The Presbyterian position.--In expounding the doctrine of the keys, most Reformed divines agreed with Calvin, who saw in Matthew 16:18f the power of authoritative preaching, and in Matthew 18:17f the power of Church censures (although he did not make the division quite so exact as this). But all depended on the authority of the Word of God; the power of the keys, he said, was properly in the Word preached, of which men were only Ministers; doctrine and discipline were only to be exercised in accordance with the promises and judgments contained therein. Discipline was committed, not to one man, but to a consistory of teaching and ruling Elders; but the people, too, had a part:

the legitimate course to be taken in excommunication, as shown by Paul, is not for the elders alone to act apart from others, but with the knowledge and approbation of the Church, so that the body of the people, without regulating the procedure, may, as witnesses and guardians, observe it, and prevent the few from doing anything capriciously.¹

Thus the power of the keys was understood to consist of the preaching of sound doctrine and the exercise of evangelical discipline; the "first subject recipient" of this power (i.e., the person or persons to whom the power was given for "exercise" or use) was the Pastor and the consistory of Elders, respectively. So it was understood by Paul Baynes (to whom Congregationalists so often appealed); he maintained that this power was not given

¹Institutes, IV.xii.7; for references to other points mentioned, see IV.xi.1, 2, 5, 6; cf. IV.xii.1-13.

to the congregation as a whole, for then all would be governors, none governed.¹ The orthodox agreed that Christ had given the keys of his house to his stewards (that is, to his officers).² But a door was left ajar which later was to be pushed open, in such phrases as, "herein is especially manifested the power of the keys, which the Lord has bestowed on the company of the faithful."³

In later Presbyterian attempts to define this power more precisely and scholastically, there still arose opportunities for confusion, and possibilities of democratic interpretation. But the position as it came to be codified seemed quite straightforward: the Lord had given two keys, order and jurisdiction. Both, it was emphasised, were keys of authority and government, and could only be given to governors. The former encompassed all that an officer could do simply on the basis of belonging to a particular order (e.g., by his order, a Pastor could preach and administer the Sacraments, and do certain acts of rule). The latter, since it was given to the Apostles as a group (and not just to Peter as a single officer), could only be exercised by Presbyters in a consistory; it included the power to censure and release from censure. Ordination was sometimes included under one

¹See Baynes, Diocesans Tryall, p. 83f (to which the London Ministers referred when, in discussing the subject, they said: "See this Proposition fully and cleerly asserted by that acute and pious Author, Master P. Baines," Jus Divinum, p. 91 margin); he here anticipated the Independent similes, of a political and natural body, and gave the same retort later used by Presbyterians, "that analogon is not in omni simile" (p. 83); cf. below, pp. 208f, 217f.

²See Baynes, op. cit., p. 60; Downname, Two Sermons, p. 38; Ball, Friendly Triall, p. 232f.

³Institutes, III.i.22.

key, sometimes under the other.¹

There was some confusion among Presbyterians as to what the keys actually were, which became worse when (especially in the face of Independent objections) attempts were made to say to whom the keys were given. It was not always as simple as it seemed, to maintain that the keys meant only government, and were therefore given only to governors.² And the confusion arose, not so much from the doctrinal systematisation, as from the limitations of the texts themselves. Matthew 16:17 was, properly speaking, the only text in the New Testament in which the keys were given;³ and all Christ actually said was, that he intended to give "keys" to Peter; all the rest was inference, and could be made to serve the interests of the party doing the interpreting. In Matthew 18:18, Christ spoke as if the Apostles, whom he was addressing, already had the keys in common. From these meagre facts, it is possible to infer: that only Peter got the "keys"; that only the Apostolic band got them; that Peter received them for his 'successors' (whether Popes, Bishops, or Pastors); or that the Apostles received them for their successors (a college of Bishops, or a consistory of Elders, or a single congregation). The keys, for Presbyterians, were only given to the Church in the way that sight is given to a man, or government to a society; they could only be exercised

¹For statements in this paragraph, see Gillespie, Assertion, p. 12f; Apollonius, Consideration, pp. 50-52, 59f; Smectymnuus, Vindication, p. 211; Jus Divinum, pp. 46, 94.

²An example of this view is found in Rutherford: "To bind and to loose, are acts of official power, and of Princes, Rulers, and Feeders. . . . To bind and to loose, by all Interpreters . . . is, by publick and pastorall preaching, to remit and retain sins, to believers or unbelievers" (Due Right, I. p. 12).

³See Hudson, Vindication, p. 207f.

by the appropriate agent.¹

Presbyterians tended to regard the keys principally as ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and so to concentrate on Matthew 18:17f; in that text, they said, Christ showed that the keys were given to his ordinary officers.² From this standpoint, they explained that in Matthew 16:18f, Peter represented all the Elders of the Universal Church.³ From this they concluded that the keys had been given "to the universall guides of the Catholick Church, the Apostles as they did represent the Presbytery of the whole Catholick visible Church."⁴ They did not mean by this, however, that every judicatory derived its power from some great ecumenical council: the "catholick representative Church" was only first in "order of nature" (i.e., logically);

but in order of time, this power is communicated from the head Christ to all the integrall parts of this great Body according to the capacity of every part, so as it is intrinsecall in the particular Eldership of a single Congregation in these poynts of Discipline, that concerne a Congregation as a Congregation, and it is intrinsecall in the classically Presbytery as it is such, and it is intrinsecall in the provincially, and Nationall Synod, in poynts belonging to them as such.⁵

¹See ibid., p. 188; Rutherford, op. cit., I. pp. 290f, 292f, 7; Jus Divinum, pp. 91, 163-165; Baynes, op. cit., p. 83. It was not clear whether this Church which received the keys was a species (Rutherford, op. cit., I. p. 8f), or the Universal Church, either invisible (ibid., I. pp. 14, 19, 242, 244-250) or visible (ibid., I. pp. 293, 340; Hudson, Vindication, p. 126).

²Said Rutherford, "he sheweth v. 18. of what Church he speaketh, and directeth his speech to these to whom he spake v. 1. to the Disciples who were Pastors" (op. cit., I. p. 14).

³See Smectymnus, Vindication, p. 211; Apollonius, op. cit., p. 63.

⁴Rutherford, op. cit., I. p. 289; cf. "the catholic representative visible Church is the first subject of the power of the Keys" (ibid., I. p. 304).

⁵Ibid., I. p. 305; cf. Hudson, op. cit., pp. 24, 188, 207f.

This is an excellent statement of the Presbyterian position, and it clearly indicates, as well, that behind their system lay one simple assumption: it was that when Christ said "tell it unto the church" (Matt. 18:17) he meant 'tell it to the presbytery.'¹

The Congregational position.--The thought of the New England Congregationalists on the subject of the keys of the kingdom of heaven may be caricatured by saying that they were looking for the key which they were certain Christ had given to the 'brethren' (i.e., the 'lay' members of the local church). This was not due to any desire to initiate a democratic polity; Henry Martyn Dexter has clearly shown that these men were no democrats.² This key they gave to the brethren conferred very little on them, in practice, which Samuel Rutherford would not have granted them; but it was vital to their polity. It was this search for the key which would help them open the door of their church system, which led the New England fathers to make an assortment of the keys, and an exegesis of the 'key' texts, which seems even stranger than that of the Roman Catholics or the Presbyterians.³ It was necessary to broaden the definition of the keys, to include more than just the traditional authority for government;⁴ but it had to be done in such a way as to exclude the possibility of Morellianism,

¹See Hollingworth, Examination, p. 20f.

²See his Congregationalism, p. 463f; cf. Alan Simpson, Puritanism in Old and New England (Chicago, 1955), p. 25; Appendix B.

³See, e.g., Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 37.

⁴"It hath often been said, and fully opened before: To have Power of the Keyes is one thing, and to be Rulers and guides is another" (Hooker, Survey, I. p. 202).

or "meer democraticall government." The breadth of the Congregational definition may be seen in Hooker's statement:

The Keyes of the Kingdome by way of Metaphor signify all that Ministeriall power by Christ dispensed, and from Christ received, whereby all the affaires of his house may be acted, and ordered, according to his mind, for the attaining of his ends purposed and appointed by himselfe.¹

Having laid this groundwork, he stated its implication (in the most extreme form of any New England divine):

Office-power, is but a little part of the power of the Keyes: like the nibble of the Key: and therefore that may well be in Officers, and yet the power of the Keyes not be firstly in them, but in such, who gave that power and gave that office to them; and therefore had a power before, theirs did give what they have, and can take away what they have given.²

So we may deduce that this redefinition of the keys was not so much concerned with granting new powers of self-government to the laity in order to prevent the tyranny of Bishops or Presbyters, as it was aimed at providing a new agency for the transmission of office-power, in order to obviate the necessity of Prelates and Presbyteries. The right of ordination and excommunication, once ensconced in the Bishop or the Classis, was now to be seated in the congregation (albeit under careful control).

The power of the keys "is double, Supreme and Monarchicall, Delegate and Ministeriall."³ Supreme power, of course, was only in Christ; but "there is also a subordinate and delegated power . . . A right given by commission from Christ to fit Persons, to

¹Ibid., I. p. 194; cf. Norton, Responsio, p. 56f.

²Hooker, Survey, I. p. 200.

³Ibid., I. p. 185; cf. Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 29, and True Constitution, p. 8.

act in his house, according to his order."¹ Of this ministerial power there were two categories, which will be referred to, for the sake of convenience, by the names Cotton gave them: official power and honorary power (there were quite a few other names used to designate these keys, but these were the clearest).²

Official or office power was much the same as the Presbyterian key of order; it consisted mainly of preaching and administering the Sacraments.³ Honorary power, or the power of the brethren confederated in church-estate (also, and somewhat misleadingly, called authority, and sometimes privilege or liberty⁴) was mainly the indispensable part they played in electing officers and in

¹Hooker, loc. cit. The word "fit" was included to parry the Presbyterian objection that Congregationalists gave church power to women; they were not "fit", by reason of a specific Biblical prohibition. See below, p. 218, n. 4.

²See Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 29; cf. his Defence, II. p. 11 (the terms were frequently given in Latin: Officiaria Potestas and Honoraria Potestas). He had previously (Keyes, pp. 11-23) divided them differently, into Keys of Faith and Order; the former (also called Knowledge) was given to all believers, and admitted them to the church; under the latter were subsumed both powers enumerated in the text (see above, p. 37f). We shall take these earlier views into account in the text, but shall follow, in the main, his later arrangement.

³See Cotton, Keyes, p. 20; it also included the right to convene the church, examine applicants, ordain Elders and Deacons, moderate, prepare matters before bringing them before the church, 'declare the Law' and 'pass the Sentence', dismiss the church with a blessing, admonish and exhort privately, and withdraw, with the ordinances, from an obstinate church; cf. Church Government &c. p. 57f.

In the Keyes, his doctrine was not always clear; he sometimes re-worded things in a way which changed their meaning (e.g., on p. 2, he said that the keys were simply preaching and administering the seals and censures, in the last of which the people had a part).

⁴See Ibid., p. 36 et passim; this only added to the confusion of his book.

admission and excommunication of members.¹ Some differences in expression and conception are noteworthy (although none, we believe, constituted any substantial variation in the system itself). Hooker, in a typical Ramist diagram, divided the power of the keys thus:

Its either a power	{	In <u>many</u> , when combined and <u>this is potestas</u>	{	<u>Judicii</u>
		In <u>one</u> , when given to him; this is <u>potestas Offici</u> [<u>sic</u>] ²		<u>Donationis</u>

By the "power of judgment" the congregation admitted and excommunicated (the well-worn logical maxim used to support this was ejusdem est recipere, reicere).³ But Hooker's difference from other New Englanders in this lay in his specifying a potestas donationis, a "power of gift and election", which was firmly in the hands of the brethern, and by which they passed on to an officer the power to do what they could not. This sounds highly "democraticall", but in fact, as Hooker elaborated it, it was not. Oddly enough, it was James Noyes, the Newbury semi-Presbyterian, who was closest to Hooker at this point: "The body of members (women and such as are unmeet to govern, excepted) hath all power originally and essentially."⁴ The "power of gift" was in their

¹See ibid., pp. 5, 12f, 36; Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 29; Norton, Responsio, p. 14f. Other acts of this fraternal 'liberty' were: to send officers on public service, as messengers; to resort to a Synod; to have communion with other churches; and to "withdraw from the communion of those, whom they want authority to excommunicate" (Cotton, Keyes, p. 17).

²Hooker, Survey, I. p. 187.

³See Cotton, Way, p. 64. ⁴Noyes, Temple, p. 10.

hands: "The people have power to elect and authorize their own Officers."¹ But they could not exercise any of the "power of office", which included (and here Noyes both dissented from the rest, and prophesied the future) the power of ordination.²

In seeking to add to the people's share in the power of the keys, Cotton tended to over-state his case: symptomatic was the intrusion of a "key of faith" into one of his enumerations of the keys,³ and his juggling with words to say that in addition to electing officers and concurring with the Elders in censures, the people "have authority . . . In the acts of liberty they may put forth by their own discerning."⁴ He buttressed this position with a novel exposition of Galatians 5:13 (which he himself confessed was to be found in no other commentator); in this text, he claimed, "freedom" did not mean liberation from sin, death, hell and the like, but liberty "in church-estate", to enter the church, to choose and call Ministers, to partake in the Sacraments and to join with the officers in censures.⁵ The Presbyterian response to this unheard-of exegesis was in the nature of an indignant snort.⁶

¹Ibid., p. 12.

²See ibid., pp. 13-16; below, pp. 219-227.

Yet another division of the people's power was proposed by Norton: they had the powers of self-determination and judgment, which they used in admissions and censures, respectively (although the distinction between the former power ["libertas"] and the latter was not at all clear); see Norton, Responsio, pp. 13-16.

³See above, p. 202, n. 2.

⁴Cotton, Keyes, p. 36.

⁵See idem.

⁶See below, p. 217.

Out of the welter of Congregational statements about the first subject of the power of the keys, there emerge two superficially disparate theories, which were really alternative logical conceptions of the way in which the power of church government was derived from Christ to those who were to exercise it. One theory posited that the keys were given first to a congregation "unpresbyterated", or without Elders; the other that they were granted only to a congregation "presbyterated", or complete with its Elders. Behind the former was the view that in Matthew 16:19 Peter received the keys as a believer; behind the latter, that he was there given them as Apostle, Elder and believer. Thomas Hooker, defending the former view, said that Peter represented "one state of condition of men", i.e., believers;¹ he received the keys because of his confession of Jesus as the Christ, and so stood in the place (or "room") of all "professed believers" (by which expression Hooker and his colleagues meant specifically those who professed this saving faith upon entering a church, and not simply unattached believers²), This position was also found in Cotton's Way; later, in the Keyes (published before, but written after, the Way) he went further:

it hath proved a busie Question, How Peter is to be considered in receiving this power of the keys, whether as an Apostle or as an Elder . . . or as a Beleever professing his faith before the Lord Jesus, and his fellow Brethren . . . Take any of them, it will not hinder our purpose . . . though

¹This was partly based on the fact that Christ had here said "to thee", and not "to them"; see Hooker, Survey, I. p. 195; cf. p. 211f.

²Cotton did give a key to those who simply believed, but it was a key by which they were enabled to enter a congregation; see his Defence, II. pp. 17, 28f.

(to speak ingenuously and without offence what wee conceive) the sense of the words will be most full, if all the severall considerations be taken joyntly together.¹

When he was taxed for his self-contradiction in this by Daniel Cawdrey,² he could only protest lamely that the "seeming" contradictions were due to differences in logical terms, or in expression.³ His statement that he favoured the later interpretation "because wee are as well studious of peace, as of truth",⁴ probably hints at the correct explanation for the change in his position. Cotton would seem to have been both conscious of the importance of placating the Presbyterians (who might at any moment have consolidated their position in England and begun to interfere with the New England establishment) and genuinely desirous of as much peace and accommodation between the two factions as possible. It was probably this combination of the political and irenic instincts which brought Cotton to a position which could be both more acceptable to Presbyterians, and at the same time not offensive to the most scrupulous Independents.

But Hooker, in the backwoods of Hartford, knew neither fear nor favour; he retained the simpler exegesis because he maintained the more sturdily congregational theory of the transmission of

¹Cotton, Keyes, p. 4; cf. p. 32f.

²See his Vindiciae, p. 7, margin.

³See Cotton, Way Cleared, II, pp. 1-4; above, pp. 33-35.

⁴Cotton, Keyes, p. 4.

church power, the 'unpresbyterated' theory:¹ "Peter speaks in the name of a community of Disciples beleiving and professing the faith with one joint consent and agreement."² He went on to say that office power was

but part of the power of the Keyes here mentioned: and therefore the Church may be the subject of the Keyes firstly and originally, and vertually communicate Office-power unto her Ministers, whom she calls, though formally she hath not that power, nor so dispenseth it . . . ³

All the power of the keys was given first to those who had some of it, i.e., the power of election; by this power, the rest of the keys were transferred to the officers:⁴ "The power of the Keyes is committed to the Church of confederate Saints as the first and proper subject thereof."⁵ And in case there might still have been any misunderstanding, he wanted to make it quite clear

that we so give the power Ecclesiastick to the Church

¹Sometime in 1645 or 1646, Cotton tells us, Hooker came down from Hartford to discuss the Survey with him. "He pleaded seriously for the Placing of all Church power, primitively, in the Body of the Church, and also for their Judiciary Power of Censure over the Presbytery, suitable to what I had delivered in the Way" (Defence, II. p. 38f). Cotton admits that he had been closer to Hooker's position when he wrote the Way, and had "diminished" the power of the brethren in the Keyes; seeing how the state of opinion was divided, both in England and New England, over this question, he decided to let both books stand as they were, in spite of Hooker's plea (see Defence, II. pp. 36-40).

²Hooker, Survey, I. p. 212; the Apostles were united with Peter in his confession, "and upon that joynt confession now instituted a Church by Christ" (idem); this, then, was the occasion of the institution of the first congregational church! Peter's confession was thus the credo of an entering church member.

³Ibid., I. p. 213.

⁴See ibid., I. p. 214f.

⁵Ibid., I. p. 192 (all italics).

of believers radically, that by their means we communicate the power of office to the Elders, and do seat office-rule formally in them.¹

Behind this position lay three important assumptions. The first involved a use of the term "first subject" which was slightly different from its contemporary acceptation. When a Presbyterian said that church officers were the "first subject" of the power of the keys, he meant that they were the first ones to be given the keys in order to use (or "exercise") them; when a Brownist said this of covenanted believers, he meant precisely the same thing of them. But when the New Englanders (especially of the 'unpresbyterated' party) said that "confederate saints" were jointly the first subject of this power, they qualified it by saying that they could only "exercise" a small part thereof;² they could not preach or administer the Sacraments.³ This was merely playing with words. Because of this semantic juggling, some students have believed that Hooker, especially, was a democrat; but in reality, he allowed the 'brethren' no more of a hand in church government than they were given on the shores of Massachusetts Bay or the Firth of Forth. The second assumption behind Hooker's system is best expressed by himself: he compared the creation of church officers by the congregation to the current philosophical theory of the origin of bodily organs, which said

¹Ibid, I. p. 206; cf. I. p. 194: "Where these Keyes of subordinate power are seated, as in the first subject: these are communicated by means of that, to all other, that partake thereof."

²See ibid., I. pp. 195f, 211.

³See Cotton, Defence, II. p. 52; cf. Ball, Tryall, p. 29 (quoting from "An Answer to Nine Positions").

that

sensitiva facultas is originaliter in animali: but is acted and communicated in the proper specifications thereof, according to the order and method of natures proceeding. The soule doth not see but by an eye, makes an eye and sees by it. So the Church makes a Minister and dispenseth word and Sacraments by him.¹

The body made the eye, but the eye did the seeing; officers exercised the power of the keys in the church, "having received it from Christ by her meanes."² The third assumption came out of the comparison made between a congregation and a city,³ and thus from contract theory:

Those who are thus met together, having power dispersed among themselves, they voluntarily consent to unite this their power, and to devolve it upon one, to whom they will submit . . .⁴

The power came, of course, from the Lord, not from the members; but this power of his was first to be found dispersed among them; they could not act it, but it was in their hands and only they could confer it. In addition to Hooker, the most notable defenders of this 'unpresbyterated' theory of the derivation of church power were John Norton of Ipswich⁵ and, oddly enough, James Noyes of Newbury.⁶

¹Hooker, Survey, I. p. 196. ²Idem (italics mine).

³See above, p. 126f.

⁴Hooker, op. cit., I. p. 190; cf. Norton, Responsio, p. 70. Ball objected, both to this and the preceding example, that the analogy broke down at this point: unlike natural and political bodies, all power in the mystical body, the Church, was first in Christ its Head; see his Friendly Triall, pp. 256ff; cf. Baynes, Diocesans Tryall, p. 83.

⁵See Norton, op. cit., pp. 56-73.

⁶See Noyes, Temple, p. 10; cf. Bartlet, Model, pp. 37, 48.

There was, however, another theory. It was succinctly described by Goodwin and Nye in introducing Cotton's Keyes to the English reader; in his theory of church power, they said, Cotton held

that look what ever power or right any of the possessours and subjects thereof may have, they have it each alike immediately (that is, in respect of a mediation of delegation or dependence on each other) from Christ, and so are each, the first subjects of that power that is allotted to them.¹

The significant difference from the former theory was that the power was not seen as conveyed from Christ to the brethren, and thence to the officers; rather, officers and members both received their share of the keys directly from Christ.² If one had to speak separately of the power belonging to brethren without officers, one could say "a particular Church or congregation of Saints . . . is the first subject of all the Church offices, with all their spirituall gifts and power."³ But Cotton preferred to speak of a congregation already 'presbyterated', "a Congregational Church of Believers furnished with Officers,"⁴ and it is of such a church that he gave his classic definition:

When the church of a particular congregation walketh together in the truth and peace, the Brethren of the church are the first subject of church-liberty, and the

¹Cotton, Keyes, sig. A3 recto (italics reversed); they specifically repudiated the ideas involved in Hooker's theory, as he did theirs (see his Survey, I. p. 195). Cf. Cotton, Defence, II. p. 54.

²See Norton, Responsio, p. 76; cf. Cotton, True Constitution, p. 9.

³Cotton, Keyes, p. 31 (all italics); cf. his Way Cleared, II. p. 29.

⁴Ibid., II. p. 36.

Elders thereof of church-authority; and both of them together are the first subject of all church-power needfull to be exercised within themselves . . . 1

And in a later book, he cleared up any possible misapprehension on this point by declaring,

I do not say (as some doe) that the Church meaning the Fraternity is the first subject of all spirituall Gifts . . . but I say the offices and Officers, . . . furnished with their gifts, are given by Christ to the Church freely, and not to any other Person or Society, from whom the Church Receiveth them.²

He emphatically asserted that he was not giving the keys to a church without officers, since this was Brownism;³ he interpreted what he had said in the Way (which sounded suspiciously like the Brownist position) as having been spoken of a church with its officers.⁴ And one feels that although certain of his statements do have a Brownist ring,⁵ in the end he belonged in the 'presbyterated' camp.

It remains to be said that for both camps, the congregation (with or without presbytery) to which the keys were given was "a Church universall existing in the particulars."⁶ Also, the theoretical difference between the two camps did not have any effect on the amount of power which the brethren actually had in their

¹Cotton, Keyes, p. 33; cf. pp. 23, 34-36; note the importance of peace, or agreement, for the exercise of the keys.

²Cotton, Defence, II. p. 49f.

³See Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 11. ⁴See ibid., II. p. 12.

⁵See Cotton, Defence, II. pp. 10-13; Way Cleared, II. p. 12.

⁶Hooker, Survey, I. p. 217; cf. pp. 220f, 229; Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 9f; Cotton Keyes, p. 31 (as corrected in his Defence, II. p. 49); Ellis, Vindiciae, pp. 77, 82.

hands and were able to use: in both systems, they could elect (and ordain) and assent to censures and admissions.

Objections and Replies

The Presbyterian attack and the New England defence had three main facets: (1) the 'key' text and the concept of the "first subject"; (2) the relationship of the church to its officers; and (3) democracy and the theory of contract. These items are by no means exhaustive of the wide-ranging topics of controversy; but they are the most important for illuminating the crucial attitudes which differentiated the two factions.

Matthew 16:19 and the "first subject."-- Of Cotton's treatment of Matthew 16:18f, Rutherford made one criticism again and again:

If Christ doe not say in this place, nor in Mat. 18, that the keys and the actes of the keys . . . are given to the Church of believers, without their Officers; then neither places prove, that the keyes are given to such a Church.¹

Cotton's later emendation, that he had been speaking of a church with its officers, did not alter the point. New Englanders reasoned from Peter's faithful confession, to a donation of the keys to the members of a confederate church; Rutherford insisted that this was a gross non sequitur.² It meant regarding the Apostolic band, recipients (through Peter) of the keys, not as a group of church officers, but solely as a congregational church;

¹Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 13; cf. p. 8f.

²See ibid., I. p. 18.

And to say, that Christ speaketh to the Apostles, not as to Apostles, but as to the Church of believers, is only a bare assertion, and cannot be proved, and all they can say, hangeth upon this one place, and this is the most.¹

The Presbyterian sensitivity on this point was due to the fact that this was the only substantial Scriptural proof for the donation of the keys to Pastors; if the Apostles here received them merely as believers, then "we desire to see a warrant from Christ, before he went to heaven, for pastorall preaching."²

Presbyterians had two objections to the Colonial position on the first subject of the keys. First, they said that their opposites often used the word "subject" when what they really meant was "object"; if confederate saints be the first subject of offices and office power, they "are either officers themselves formally . . . or they can make officers virtually."³ They wondered if the word was being "here used improperly, for object, for whose good all offices with their gifts and power are given?"⁴ Second, they protested that in the text in question "doth Christ give the keys, to whom he giveth warrant, for the actuall exercise of the keys;"⁵ not only did a congregation have no warrant to exercise the keys,⁶ but to say that power was given to the congregation, and the exercise of that power to the Elders,

¹Idem.

²Ibid., I. p. 11; cf. pp. 6, 32; cf. R.[ichard] H.[ollingworth], An Examination of Sundry Scriptures (1645), p. 21f.

³Jus Divinum, p. 111. ⁴Idem.

⁵Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 11; cf. p. 18.

⁶See Jus Divinum, p. 98f.

was merely to play with words. As Gillespie shrewdly said of the Independents:

Thus doe they put a difference betwixt the power it selfe, and the exercise of it, ascribing the former to the collective body of the Church, the latter to the representative: knowing that otherwise they could not preserve the distinction of Rulers and ruled in the Church.¹

Daniel Cawdrey added that if the officers were the first subject of rule and authority, then the church was not the first subject of all church power.²

As we have seen, behind the Presbyterian objections to what they felt was a misuse of this text lay the fact that it represented for them Christ's donation of governmental authority (including pastoral preaching) to the body of his officers;

These to whom we are to complain, these and these only, are to be heard, and obeyed as Judges binding and loosing in Earth and validly in Heaven, Mat. 18. but these are not the multitude, nor one Elder only, but the Church of Elders.³

This Presbyterian contention that the keys were given "to the universall guides of the catholick Church, the Apostles as they did represent the Presbytery of the whole Catholick visible Church";⁴ that there existed, even generically, a universal Presbytery with all church power in its hands; this was purposefully opposed by the New Englanders, and especially by Hooker.

¹Gillespie, Assertion, p. 111; cf. Ball, Friendly Trial, p. 234.

²See Cawdrey, Vindiciae, p. 70.

³Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 36; cf. p. 190.

⁴Ibid., I. p. 289; cf. pp. 292f, 313f, 323f; Hudson, Vindication, sig. al verso, pp. 154, 203, 208.

By assuming that the power to elect officers was part of the power of the keys, and that a power was not necessarily given first to those who were first to exercise it, he demonstrated that officers did not have all of the power of the keys; rejecting the idea that a part of the power could be given to one first subject and a part to another, he concluded that it all belonged first to that society which first had a part of it: the coetus fidelium.¹ If, as Rutherford had said, the keys were given in this text to the Apostles as representing a single society of church officers, Hooker wanted to know which officers they represented, ruling or teaching? and how considered, severally or jointly? In both cases, he asserted, the alternatives were mutually exclusive. And the idea that they represented Elders in a Synod or Council was denied on the grounds that there must be brethren in a council, and that the authority of any council was delegated to it from the churches, and not in it as a first subject.²

The church and its officers.--In dealing with the New England statements about the relationship between the church and its officers, Presbyterians hammered at the point (implied by Cotton, and stated by Hooker) that a church was complete without any officers. Since their church had its being, its esse, without officers, since "the Eldership are called by them, the adjuncts,"³ and the church was a church without them,⁴ it was obvious to

¹See Hooker, Survey, I. pp. 211, 214f.

²See ibid., I. pp. 222f, 229-236; cf. Norton, Responsio, p. 46.

³Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 6; cf. pp. 1-6, 22, 83-130.

⁴See ibid., I. pp. 241, 246f.

Rutherford that they held Pastors to be no part of the church,¹ and that "our brethren hold a meere popular government, with Morellius."² And Baylie added that no matter what they might say, principle and practice alike revealed "that they maintaine the Jurisdiction of a Church, as well unpresbyterated . . . as of a Church Presbyterated."³ They objected that this Independent doctrine not only ran afoul of Presbyterian principles,⁴ but of New England practice as well. They could not see why a congregation having the keys, and therefore able to "administer and partake of all church-ordinances," should make an exception in the case of the Sacraments.⁵ This implied, they said, that an unpresbyterated congregation was not, in fact, perfectly and completely a church, since it lacked integral and essential parts; "a perfect living man," said Rutherford, "doth not make his own Hands, Feete, or Eyes."⁶ They also claimed that this doctrine implied either that there was no difference between rulers and ruled;⁷ or that the brethren were actually the governors;⁸ or

¹See ibid., I. p. 22. ²Idem; cf. I. p. 26.

³Baylie, Dissvasive, p. 182.

⁴"A Church of Governours and People governed is an instituted visible Church; but there is an instituted visible Church before there be Governours, but such an instituted Church we cannot read of in Gods Word, which doth and may exercise Church acts of government without any officers at all" (Rutherford, op. cit., I. p. 4).

⁵See Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 23f; Ball, Tryall, p. 75; Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 3.

⁶Idem. ⁷See ibid., I. p. 25f.

⁸See ibid., I. pp. 6, 26, II. p. 312.

that a Minister did his authoritative acts by commission from the people, and not directly from Christ.¹

Democracy and the theory of contract.---For just about the most serious charge that Presbyterians could fling at Independents was that they "hold a meere popular government," leading to anarchy, separation and companionship with Brownists, Arminians and Socinians.² They established that it was a democracy:

Because by our brethren, the government and the most eminent and authoritative acts thereof are in the hands of the people. . . . Because the people are not only to consent to the censures, and acts of government, but also authoritatively to judge with coequal power with the Eldership, as they prove . . . ³

They were amazed at Cotton's exegesis of Galatians 5:13, which referred 'liberty' to the church power possessed by the brethren;⁴ Baylie called it "the most unreasonable throwing of the holy Scripture that I have readily seene."⁵ He perceived that Cotton was moving toward the more aristocratic system of Francis Johnson, but said that he spoiled it by retaining the necessity of the people's consent.⁶ When New Englanders attempted to sup-

¹See Rathband, op. cit., p. 43; Jus Divinum, p. 108: "from whomsoever power is derived, in their name is that power to be dispensed"; Ball, Tryall, p. 71.

²See Baylie, Dissvative, 130; Jus Divinum, p. 104; cf. 1647 ed., p. 180; Rutherford, op. cit., I. p. 17.

³Ibid., I. p. 26. ⁴See Cotton, Keyes, p. 8f.

⁵Baylie, op. cit., p. 194; cf. p. 182f; Jus Divinum, p. 110.

⁶See Baylie, op. cit., p. 110. James Noyes' 'advanced' opinion hereanent was that "the Presbyterie is to govern with great condescendencie, and to labour for the consent of the Church in cases of moment" (Temple Measured, p. 29; italics mine).

port their contractarian theory of the way in which authority was derived in a church, by comparing its government to civil politics, Rutherford objected that the analogy did not hold, since authority in the Church was first in Christ. "Christs calling is not ordered according to the patterne of civill governments," he jibed, throwing a favourite Independent maxim back at them.¹ He also pointed out that, in the same contractarian vein, "they alwayes conclude Church-power from the graces of the members of the Church."² But even if the members were all saints, protested George Gillespie, "surely their sanctification can not import their fitnessse to exercise jurisdiction in the Church."³ And if it did, what then was to exclude women and children from taking part in church government (a question which was always delivered with the flourish of a final and unanswerable argument)?⁴

¹See Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 20f; quotation from p. 200.

²Ibid., I. p. 26; for one example of this, see Hooker, Survey, I. p. 204f: "Such onely are to be members of the visible Church, who are in charities judgement visible Saints: and those who are such, they have received an annointing in some measure, as that they will hear and can discern the voice of Christ, and will follow him, and submit to him. Such are able to discerne false Doctrine and false Teachers: such are able to choose themselves Pastors, as being able to relish the savour of spiritual administrations, and to feelee what Key will best open their lock: can see and discerne what courses be sinfull and scandalous, persons obstinate and pertinacious therein."

³Gillespie, Assertion, p. 113.

⁴See Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 28f. The answer usually was, "as for women and children, there is a speciall exception by a Statute-law of Christ against their injoyment of any part of this publique power"; Cotton, Keyes, sig. A3 recto; cf. his Way Cleared, II. p. 43; Hooker, Survey, I. pp. 132, 186, 212; Cotton, Defence, II. p. 30; Mather, Reply, chap. xvii.

The Exercise of the Keys

Election and Ordination

Was ever such a thing heard of, either in the Primitive, or following times, that Lay-men should be so far admitted to the managing of spirituall jurisdiction, as to lay¹ their hands upon their Ministers in their Ordination?

asked Bishop Hall, shocked at the practice of 'lay' Elders taking part in ordinations in some Continental Reformed Churches. What he might have said upon reading that orthodox (New England) divines taught "that the Church of believers, being destitute of all officers, may ordaine their own officers and Presbyters, by imposition of hands,"² we are spared from knowing. But we do know the Presbyterians reaction to it; it was sharp and hostile, and it precipitated one of the hottest debates in the whole of the encounter between them and their New England 'brethren.'

The early New England position was quite straightforward: if a congregation had Elders, the Elders performed ordinations, without the aid of the people, or of the Elders of other congregations; if a congregation had no Elders, it could ask the assistance of neighbouring Elders, but the ordination itself (by imposition of hands) was performed only "by some principall members in the congregation."³

Although they could claim New Testament authorisation for restricting ordination to the officers of only one congregation,⁴

¹Hall, A Defence of the Humble Remonstrance, p. 78.

²The words are Rutherford's (Due Right, I. p. 175, all italics), summarising the description given by Cotton in the Way, p. 41.

³Mather and Thompson, Modest and Brotherly, p. 53; cf. Cotton, loc. cit., and True Constitution, p. 10.

⁴See Mather and Thompson, op. cit., p. 50.

they admitted they could find no precedent there for ordination by laymen; it had been unnecessary then, "for there were the Apostles and Apostolicke men, who were Elders in all Churches."¹ So for lay-ordination they had to seek authorisation in the Old Testament, and principally in Numbers 8:10, which was the Divine command that when the Levites were dedicated to the service of the Tabernacle, "the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites." They took this to mean that "some Prime Men" were delegated to perform the task.² Rathband objected that the Levites were already Elders, elected by God and ordained by the Priests, and that the ceremony alluded to was meant to express the fact that the Lord was now accepting the Levites for his service in place of the first-born of all the tribes.³ Mather readily agreed to this interpretation, saying that this was precisely what ordination was.⁴

But the main support for the New England theory of ordination was not so much the Scriptural examples (which were sketchy and uncertain at best), but rather their conception of the relationship between ordination and election: "Men that are in no Office may elect, therefore they may ordaine, because ordination is nothing else but the execution of Election."⁵ The possible

¹Ibid., p. 49.

²See Mather, Reply, p. 96; Welde, Answer, chap. xii.

³See Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 41; Rutherford added that those "Prime Men" were officers; see Due Right, I. p. 199.

⁴See Mather, Reply, chap. xxiv.

⁵Church-Government &c., I. p. 69.

alternatives, as they saw them, were: either an officer was to minister without ordination (this they held unscriptural); or by virtue of some former ordination (this would lead to "the Popish opinion of the indelible Character" of "holy Orders"); or he was to be ordained by officers of another congregation (but officers had no authority to do church-acts outside their own congregation).¹ But the problem was solved if ordination

is not onely lesse then election, but lesse in the same kind, being nothing else, but the accomplishment of election, or the admission of a person into the possession of that office, whereto he had right before by election.²

If a congregation could elect (which all granted³), then they could ordain, since this was less than election.⁴ And since ordination was merely the formal installation of an elected pastor over his flock, a new one was naturally called for when he took the charge of a new flock.⁵

To combat this unheard-of doctrine, Rutherford came back with the contrary:

Ordination is more than the installing of a person chosen, it is a supernaturall act of the Presbytery separating a man to an holy calling, election is posterior to it, and is but an appropriation of a called person his Ministry,

¹See idem et seq.

²Mather and tompson, op. cit., p. 47; cf. Hooker, Survey, II. p. 41: "Ordination doth depend upon the peoples lawfull Election, as an Effect upon the Cause."

³See Campbell, Triumph, p. 91.

⁴See Mather and Tompson, op. cit., p. 55; Mather, Reply, p. 102; Welde, Answer, chap. xii.

⁵See Cambridge Platform, ix. 7.

to such a particular flock.¹

He reasoned that what the Apostles did in the creation of the Deacons, was more important than what the people did there;² Apostolic practice was to ordain, with the people's consent (as in Acts 14:23);³ this consent of the people was something for which Rutherford was fighting in his own camp⁴); and furthermore,

wee finde no Church-calling in all Gods Word of sole election of the people, and therefore it cannot be the essentiall forme of a right calling.⁵

When a church elected a man to be a Pastor to them, it supposed him to be a Pastor already.

Hooker, in replying, turned things back the way they had been before Rutherford started transposing them.⁶ Where the Scot had said that ordination gave all the essentials of a Minister's calling, and election merely assigned him to exer-

¹Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 199 (ordination makes a man "a Pastor of the Church Universall"; p. 200); he admitted that in Acts 6:3ff, election was temporally prior to ordination, but said that did not mean it was prior in order of nature (see ibid., I. p. 494).

²See ibid., I. p. 198f. ³See ibid., I. p. 190.

⁴See e.g. ibid., I. pp. 495-497; cf. Campbell, Triumph, p. 128; Thomas Murray, The Life of Samuel Rutherford (Edinburgh, 1828), p. 298: "In the General Assembly of 1649, when the question as to the election of ministers for vacant benefices was under consideration, we find him support the principle, that the election should belong exclusively to the people."

⁵Ibid., I. p. 205.

⁶See Hooker, Survey, II. pp. 38-78, 81-86; this is still a valuable discussion of this subject.

cise his office in such and such a place,¹ Hooker countered that since a Pastor thus ordained but not yet assigned could not exercise his office, he was therefore not yet possessed of it. He concluded that it was election which gave a man the essentials of his calling; ordination was merely a formal approbation and installation of him therein (adjunctum consummans, a consummating adjunct, as Ames had called it).² To prove that ordination did not give the essentials of a Minister's calling, he examined I Timothy 4:14, and rather tentatively posited that the "gift" referred to there was an extraordinary spiritual ability, fitting Timothy for his office, and given by the Holy Spirit through the laying on of Paul's hands (by which he was constituted an extraordinary officer), followed by the approbatory imposition of hands by a Presbytery (whether of one congregation or many), but only for encouragement, not to make him an officer.³ Since, therefore, ordination was only an adjunct to a Minister's calling, the calling itself was complete in the people's election, for it was by voluntary submission of the people (and not by any authoritative commission from Bishop or Classis) that the right to rule was given;⁴ hence "there is

¹See Apollonius, Consideration, p. 46.

²See Hooker, Survey, II. pp. 46f, 66f, 74f; Ames, Marrow, I. xxxix. 34; Norton, Responsio, p. 102f; Welde, Brief Narration, p. 6.

³See Hooker, Survey, II. pp. 54-60.

⁴See Winthrop, Journal, p. 123f.

an act of power put forth in election."¹ Since it was a greater act of power than that put forth in ordination, and greater "in the same kind," the church which did the former might also do the latter.² The obvious question at this point (which Daniel Cawdrey asked) was, if election and the sub-
mission of the people gave an officer his power, then ordination was not necessary; why then did the New Englanders still require it?³ It may be that when Ramist logic had done its best, the point made by Richard Vines still haunted them:

I should not stick to say, that there is clearer evidence in Scripture for ordination of Ministers by imposition of hands, than for election by the people.⁴

Concerning imposition of hands, both factions agreed that it was a "separable adjunct" to ordination, a gesture signifying prayer over a particular person; it was the prayer that was decisive, together with the appointing of him to his place, and

¹Hooker, Survey, II. p. 73; cf. Ames, Marrow, I. xxxix. 32. Reference was made to Acts 14:23, translating καὶ ἐποτιμῶντες as 'elected' rather than as 'ordained'; see e.g. Bartlet, Model, p. 36.

²See Hooker, Survey, II. p. 78; he added that since it was an act of order, not jurisdiction, the people might do it (cf. Baylie, Dissvative, p. 194f). Noyes agreed with much of this, but insisted that the people could not ordain (it being an act of a different kind from election); if no officers could be had, election alone had to suffice; see Noyes, Temple, p. 14f.

³See Cawdrey, Vindiciae, p. 72.

⁴Richard Vines, Authors, nature and danger, p. 18; cf. Hollingworth, Certain Queres, p. 24; Rutherford, Due Right, I. pp. 188, 205.

instructing him in his duties.¹ They also agreed that in exceptional cases (such as a group of believers cast up on an island, or the failure and corruption of all visible churches), a church might elect and ordain its own officers.² Since Presbyterians allowed this, New Englanders asked them how they reconciled it with their belief that ordination, not election, gave the essentials of office; for they granted that in exceptional cases, "that can be allowed which may stand for ordination it self, and which makes a Minister as truly as ordination doth."³ They argued that if a practice was lawful in exceptional cases, it was also lawful in ordinary cases;⁴ Presbyterians protested that this was unheard-of; practices lawful in necessity were not thereby lawful ordinarily, and a church on an island was a case of extraordinary necessity, "to which all positive law giveth place."⁵

¹ See Hooker, Survey, II. pp. 59f, 74f; Noyes, Temple, pp. 69-73; Mather, Reply, pp. 101, 106. In Scotland, hands were not laid on Ruling Elders; see Gillespie, Assertion, p. 103f. See also Milton, Animadversions, p. 50; Daneau, Commentarius at I Tim. 5:22: "Impositio manum non est ulla pars essentialis legitimae vocationis." But contrast Mather and Thompson, Modest & Brotherly, p. 49: "Officers must not be admitted without imposition of hands."

Confusion sometimes arose because the term 'ordination' could be used simply to refer to the rite of imposition.

² See Apollonius, Consideration, pp. 57f, 107f; Gillespie, Propositions, p. 16; Rutherford, Due Right, I. pp. 7f, 185-187, 301f, 338; cf. Norton Responsio, p. 104f; Hooker, Survey, II. p. 76f.

³ Mather, Reply, p. 77; cf. Mather and Thompson, op. cit., p. 52.

⁴ See ibid., p. 5f; cf. M.S. to A.S., p. 71f.

⁵ Apollonius, Consideration, p. 58.

Presbyterians were prone to pillory the New England way because they believed it made an officer to be a servant of the congregation which gave him his office.¹ It is difficult to see how they justified this, for in their own polity they said that

the Ordinary Church-guides, though they may have a designation to their office by the Church, yet they have the donation, or derivation of their office and its authority only from Christ.²

They seemed to feel that this could only be properly manifested when an officer was sent to a congregation by a Presbytery.³

But the New England divines held exactly the same theory, merely insisting that a different agency (the congregation) designated a man to the office, and passed to him the authority, which Christ alone ordained, delimited and empowered;⁴ "and yet the man is not sent by them, but sent of God." This did not alter their belief that (just as a church existed only by the mutual covenanting of a group of visible saints, so) a Minister existed only by his covenant relationship with a particular flock, "and without this covenanting there neither is, nor ever was, or will be Pastor

¹Rutherford, perhaps sensing the affinity to his own position, abandoned this argument for one which said that the keys given to the brethren made them superior to their officers; Due Right, I. p. 192f.

²Jus Divinum, p. 95; cf. Baynes, Diocesans Tryall, p. 72.

³See Ball, Tryall, pp. 54, 73, and Friendly Triall, pp. 233-245; the text for this was Rom. 10:15 (see Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 79).

⁴See Hooker, Survey, II. pp. 41-49; Mather, Reply, p. 106; Cotton, Way, p. 43.

and Flock."¹ Election and submission constituted the optimum form of this covenant, although tacit consent would suffice (just as it would in the case of the congregational covenant);² otherwise the New England divines would not have been valid Ministers in their English charges.

Finally, Presbyterians objected that most of the members of a congregation were not fit to judge a man's qualifications for the Ministry. From across the ocean came the reply that visible saints will know their shepherd's voice, and have "some abilitie to discern"; enough, at any rate, to elect a man, and so to ordain him.³ Rutherford pointed out that gracious knowledge and the wisdom to test a Pastor's fitness were two different things.⁴ And actual practice in New England agreed with this; magistrates and Ministers were always present to make sure that the candidate was orthodox. Moreover, there grew up amongst Presbyterian writers the not unfounded suspicion that New England ordinations were performed by the Elders of other congregations.⁵

¹Hooker, Survey, I. p. 72; see I. pp. 61, 73, for the analogy of a Mayor in a city; cf. Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 201; Norton, Responsio, p. 97: "nulla ratio dari potest, praeter consensum mutuum: cui relatio politica superioritatis, & subjectionis inter liberos, nitatur."

²See ibid., p. 98.

³See Mather and Tompson, Modest & Brotherly, p. 51; Church-Government &c., p. 42f; cf. Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 40.

⁴See Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 494f.

⁵For examination of this and other questions anent the alleged democracy of the New England way, see Appendix B.

Censures

Independents were convinced that the exercise of all censures, including excommunication, belonged to the local congregation; not, as the Presbyterians said, to a Classis.¹ Their reasoning was similar to that used to prove the congregation's right to ordination:

Because every particular Church hath right to the word, Sacraments and prayer within it self, which are greater. Therefore it hath right to this, that is lesser than they.²

The New England procedure in censures was built up on the New Testament 'pattern.'³ Censures were to be used only for known offences irremediable by any other means; they were not to be applied as strictly as the tests for admission ("known non-regeneration" could keep a man out of the church; it could not exclude him once he was in).

If an offence were private, the brother was to be privately admonished; if he were impenitent, or, if the offence were more widely known, the admonisher was to take two or three with him.

¹In the Presbyterian view, excommunication was an act performed only by a Classis or Synod (the lower degrees of censure remained with the congregation; see Herle, Independency, p. 2); even when pronounced by a single Minister within his congregation, it was an act he did as "virtualiter in Collegio . . . as the deligate [sic] of the Presbytery" (Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 326; cf. Apollonius, Consideration, pp. 121ff; Baylie, Dissvative, p. 7f). The reasons were: (1) that consociated churches had voluntarily joined their power in a shared government, and (2) that what might infect all those round about should be dealt with by all in common: "Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari debet" (Rutherford, op. cit., I. p. 198; cf. pp. 74-77, 197f; II. p. 187).

²Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 45f.

³This section is collected from Cotton, Way, chap. v, pp. 89-95, and Hooker, Survey, III. pp. 33-40; see also Cambridge Platform, xiv. 1-7, and Dexter, Congregationalism, pp. 450-452.

If the brother denied his fault, and it could not be proved, there could be no further proceedings. If the fault were admitted or proved, and not repented, the admonisher and witnesses were to 'tell the church.' This was done in these stages:

(1) they informed the Elders of the fault, and of their procedure; (2) the Elders inquired into the matter, and if it were petty, they might suppress the proceedings, so as not to disturb the church's peace (if the complainant were not satisfied with this, he might appeal directly to the congregation about the Elders' action); or else they were to prepare the matter for the church's cognisance. (3) The Elders informed the church of the matter, and 'laboured' with the offender before the congregation (any of whom might request the Elders' permission to speak to the matter); if he repented, the process ended. (4) If he did not, and if he proved contumacious, or the matter were gross or heinous, it proceeded straightway to excommunication; if he persisted through ignorance, or if it were a lesser sin, admonition was the next step.

(5) Admonition was pronounced by an Elder,¹ with the consent of the congregation; the offender was warned to see his danger and repent; he lost his vote, and was to abstain from the Lord's Supper. If he repented and renounced his sin, he was reinstated; if he persisted, he was excommunicated. "Such gradual proceeding" as has been outlined hereto was omitted in the case of such gross, public offences as fornication, adultery,

¹In some places, the Pastor or Teacher, in others the Ruling Elder; see Dexter, op. cit., p. 451, n. 136.

incest, murder, "rayling," extortion, idolatry, blasphemy or profaneness.¹ (6) In excommunication, the offender was excluded from all church communion (voting and the Lord's Supper, and Baptism for his children, if they could be presented in his right only; but not preaching and prayer, as these were common to the heathen) and any private communion (especially eating) whose cessation would not violate natural relationships.²

Excommunication was only to be used in cases of heinous evils obstinately persisted in; evils, that is, which would be known to be such to any enlightened mind.³ Since a congregation might err, and there was no authoritative relief from appeals outside its jurisdiction, it was considered that those "unjustly excommunicated, doe continue still visible members of the flock of Christ."⁴

Excommunication was to be carried out with complete unanimity, or common consent of the congregation. Dissenters from the Elders' course were to be heard, and if they presented weighty reasons from the Word, their advice followed. If they did not, they were to be convinced of their error from Scripture; if they

¹See Cotton, True Constitution, p. 11.

²Such as between a husband and wife, parent and child, magistrate and subject; interdicted was "all voluntary and unnecessary familiarity" (Hooker, Survey, III. p. 39); cf. Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 46f; Winslow, Hypocrisie, p. 87. All of this was similar to the Presbyterians' position, who did not, however, prohibit Baptism (see Hudson, Vindication, p. 62; Rutherford, Survey, p. 20).

³See Davenport and Hooke, loc. cit.; cf. Apologeticall Narration, p. 9.

⁴Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 146; meaning by "flock," "that particular Church out of which they are cast."

remained stubborn against the 'cleer light of the Word,' they were put under admonition for their pride, so that "the liberty of their voyce is taken from them."¹ The congregation could then proceed unanimously. If doubts could not be resolved, the advice of neighbour churches was called for, with which the dissenters had to rest satisfied and allow the major part to proceed.²

No Presbyterian disagreed with the idea that the people should consent to a sentence of excommunication; it was obvious that for the censure to be effective to the full, they would have to assist by carrying out their part;³ but they shrank from the conclusion that the Independents drew, that there was any causal or authoritative virtue in this consent.⁴ And they repudiated the idea that the people judged and censured authoritatively, in a power commensurate with that of the Elders.⁵ Moreover, they ridiculed the theory that without some kind of unity among the brethren, sentence could not be passed;⁶ Rutherford regarded it

¹Cotton, Way, p. 95.

²See Hooker, Survey, III. p. 40; he omitted the admonition of dissenters, while Cotton (see loc. cit.) advocated both consultation and admonition; cf. Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 169; Church-Government &c., pp. 60ff.

³Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 40: "if you speak of excommunication in all the acts of it, we doe not exclude the whole multitude . . . from a popular consenting to the sentence, and a popular execution of the sentence of excommunication."

⁴Cf. Hooker, Survey, I. p. 197, III. p. 43.

⁵See Rutherford, op. cit., I. p. 35; Apollonius, op. cit., pp. 50-52.

⁶See Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 27f; cf. Cotton, Keyes, p. 47f. In Salem and some other New England churches; however, censures could pass by a majority vote simply; see Dexter, Congregationalism, p. 451, and n. 142.

as unattainable, even amongst visible saints. To say that such saints ought not to disagree, he said, was like saying "the house should not be fired: true, but the question is how shall water be had to quench it."¹

One of the main things which led to Congregationalism was the conviction that when Christ said "tell it unto the church" (Matthew 18:17), he did not mean tell the Bishop or the Classis or the Pastor;² he meant precisely what he said, that an offender who would not respond to the private remonstrance of two or three fellow-Christians was to be reported to the congregation. Thus it comes as something of a jolt to read, in Lechford's Plain Dealing:

Ordinarilly, matter of offence is to be brought to the Elders in private, they may not otherwise tell the Church in ordinary matters, and so it hath been declared in publique, by the Pastors of Boston.³

And although the New England divines explained that this merely enabled the Elders to go over matters in advance to smooth their passage, a bit of reading between the lines makes it clear just how much part the people had in determining matters in, say, the church at Hartford:

by the order of Christ, the Elders are to receive the complaints, and to prepare them for the Congregation, and then they are to report them unto the people, and they to hear and receive them, and they are to passe a Judicial sentence, the Elders leading the action in an

¹Rutherford, Due Right, II. p. 309f.

²Cotton, Way, p. 96f.

³Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 12; cf. Cotton, op. cit., p. 97f.

orderly manner, and taking their consent thereunto.¹

And any lingering doubts are garotted by this sentence:

The fraternity have no more power to oppose the sentence of the censure, thus prepared and propounded by the Elders, then they have to oppose their dictrine [sic] which they shall publish.²

They had answered Rutherford's question; they had found water with which to quench any disagreement of the brethren with the Elders' course of action.

The practical aim of both polities was the same: to put the authority for church government in the Elders' hands; and by divergent roads they came to the same destination. When Presbyterians were confronted with texts (like Matthew 18:17, or I Corinthians 5:4f) which seemed to seat the exercise of discipline in the whole congregation, they indulged in an elegant kind of begging the question: although the texts referred to the whole congregation, they said, yet they were intended only for those who could exercise discipline; only Elders could exercise discipline; therefore the texts did not refer to the whole congregation.³ New England divines, on the other hand, believed that these texts demanded that the exercise of spiritual jurisdiction was to be in the congregation; that the keys were to be in the

¹Hooker, Survey, I. p. 137f; cf. p. 134f, III. p. 38.

²Ibid., III. p. 41 (all italics); they could, of course, try censuring or deposing their Elders, but it would not have been easy.

When Hudson read Cotton's description of the practice of censures in New England, he said, "our brethren . . . have of late . . . debarred the people from votes, and put it into the hands of the Elders only" (Vindication, p. 20).

³See Rutherford, Due Right, I. pp. 37, 39, 339, 348ff.

hands of the people. They then constructed a system by which they took back with the left hand the spiritual jurisdiction which they had granted to the people with the right. The keys were in the hands of the people, in New England; but only the Elders could turn them.

VI. THE OLIGARCHY

Quod non est Ecclesia, non potest exercere jurisdictionem Ecclesiasticam:
Synodus non est Ecclesia: Ergo

--Norton, Responsio, p. 115

It is no perfection to be so independent as to become insolent and impotent.

--Noyes, Temple, p. 56

The Synod

Independents hated to be called, or even to be thought of as, Separatists.¹ They could accept the label "Independent";

But if the word be abusively taken (as it is often with the vulgar) for such a Society as are neither subject to Magistracy, nor regard the counsel of other Churches, but are a conceited and self-sufficient people, that stand onely on their owne leggs. Then wee have cause to be shie of a word, that may render us odious without cause.²

In writing this, Thomas Welde spoke for all New England Congregationalists (this was the designation which suited them best). There in their little Puritan Commonwealth, they put to death the persistent belief that the establishment of Congregationalism could lead only to anarchy and confusion: they were "subject to Magistracy"; they did "regard the counsel of other Churches." That Presbyterians so often failed to recognise this was partly due to distance, prejudice, and polemic exigency. But it was

¹See Apologeticall Narration, pp. 14, 21; cf. Bartlet, Model, p. 27.

²Welde, Answer, p. 63.

also exceedingly difficult for a Presbyterian writer to visualise just what the New England divines were talking about, and just how their system operated. After puzzling over some of their writings, Baylie complained that "they admit not of any Classicall Presbytery differing from a Synod; . . . they grant not any interposition of a Classis [i.e., between a 'Session' and a Synod]."¹ This difficulty was increased by the fact that terms such as "Presbytery" and "Synod" were not then used with the precision they attained in later times.²

But the root cause of the confusion was that, while both sides derived their systems of church polity from an analysis of the New Testament material about the church, they each saw very different things when they looked at the Apostolic Churches. They both agreed that in each city there had been a church governed by a Presbytery. But while Presbyterians said that this Church had been a group of congregations with a common governing body (the "Classis"), Congregationalists insisted that this church had been just one single congregation. It is this (seemingly) minor point upon which the difference between the two denominations ultimately rests. A Congregationalist cannot have a Classis; he

¹Baylie, Dissvative, p. 113.

²Thus, comparing them to terms in modern Presbyterian usage, a Session would be called a "Presbytery" (or sometimes a "Parochial Presbytery" or "Congregational Eldership"); a Presbytery could also be known as a "Presbytery" as well as a "Classis" or "Classical Presbytery"; Synod, General Assembly and Ecumenical Council were all called "Synod" or "Assembly," and sometimes distinguished by the adjectives "Provincial," "National," and "Ecumenical." Independents agreed with them as far as the parochial level, and beyond that they had only "Synods" (later called "Councils"); this was true no matter what their size. See Jus Divinum, pp. 181f, 215f.

already has his "Presbytery" in each congregation. But by the same token, a Presbyterian should not have a Parochial Presbytery ('Session'); he already has his "Presbytery" over each group of congregations. The student of historical origins must explain the Presbyterian Session; but strictly speaking it is theoretically incompatible with the existence of the Presbytery or Classis, and probably owes something, at least for its justification, to the Congregational Presbytery.¹

On this basis, it is easier to understand the peculiar similarities and differences between the two views of the Synod. When the two systems are compared from the outside, the fact that the Independent Synod occupies the same place in relation to a group of congregations as does a Presbyterian Classis, makes it tempting to equate the two and regard them as basically the same body with different names. But this is misleading. In each system the Synod is derived from precisely the same Biblical material, and stands in almost the same relation to the Presbytery. The differences between the two systems of polity are explained when it is realised that the Independent Synod corresponds, not to the Classis, but to the Presbyterian Synod; just as the Independent Presbytery corresponds, not to the 'Session,' but to the

¹See Jus Divinum, p. 190; Baylie, Dissvative, pp. 199-216. The Classis was not the same kind of judicatory as the various Synods (see Jus Divinum, p. 215f); it was a constant governing body, while Synods were occasional; it exercised government and authority, while Synods were for appeal (see Hudson, Vindication, pp. 152, 189f). This underlines the point that the Presbytery in each system, in spite of differences, had the same original; and the same was true of the Synod.

It is true that in the Scottish Church, the Session existed before the Presbytery; here, however, the discussion is of theory rather than practice.

Presbyterian Classis. The Congregationalists did not leave out a Classical Presbytery; the Presbyterians added a parochial one.

Scriptural Sources

The Scriptures used by both groups as authorisation for their Synods were Acts 15 (fully discussed above¹) and Matthew 18:17. From the latter text it was argued that just as Christ had provided a way for an offended brother to complain of another to the church, so an offended church should be able to complain to a higher judicatory, which should have authoritative power to settle the difference or dispute;² otherwise, as Presbyterians were fond of saying, the salve would not be as broad as the sore.³ But Presbyterians realised that most of this was only inference from the Word (even if they believed that the inference was justified); speaking of a Synod, the most Gillespie could say was, "it is lawfull and agreeable to the Word of God."⁴ Hudson attempted to explain the strange silence of Scripture concerning Synods:

Extraordinary cases cannot be regulated by ordinary rules. And this I conceive is the reason why the Scripture hath not determined more particularly the Synodical Assemblies; but only giveth general rules that may be drawn to particulars, because all Churches and seasons are not capable of national or provincial Synods, in regard of many things that may be incident.⁵

New England Independents likewise appealed to Acts 15; but even if they called the meeting described therein a Synod (which

¹See pp. 46-50. ²See Cawdrey, Vindiciae, p. 42f.

³See Jus Divinum, p. 255f; Hudson, Vindication, p. 163.

⁴Gillespie, Propositions, p. 9; cf. p. 14.

⁵Hudson, op. cit., p. 116.

all did not), they asserted that it was not the kind of Synod the Presbyterians thought it was. As for Matthew 18:17, they criticised the Presbyterian use of it, saying that the proportional analogy, by which the Synodical remedy must be as large as the disease, meant that there would have to be a General Council to appeal to from time to time.¹ Presbyterians denied "that this remedy is needfull in any Church above a Nationall Church";² but Richard Mather protested:

For my part, I know no reason, but if the Congregation be lyable to the censure of Classes and Synods by this Scripture; because our Saviours remedy is a Church remedy, by the same reason the Classes and Synods must be lyable to censure also; yea, and the nationall Church likewise.³

And he added that if a General Council were a necessary part of Christ's remedy, it was small honour to his provision for his Church, since such a Council was not likely to be available to the Church for many ages.⁴ New Englanders did, however, appeal to this text when they needed justification for their Synods, saying, like the Presbyterians, that as one brother was to be brought before the church, so one church could be brought before many churches. But they did not complete the analogy, by saying that the many churches could then excommunicate the offending church.⁵ At this point they drew the line, and begged the ques-

¹See Mather and Tompson, Modest & Brotherly, pp. 27ff.

²Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 283.

³Mather, Reply, p. 86.

⁴See idem; cf. Hooker, Survey, IV. p. 18: "there hath not been a Generall Synod neere upon this two hundred yeeres, nor when there will be any, who can tell?"

⁵See Cotton, Keyes, p. 24f.

tion by appealing to the principle being debated, that there was no church jurisdiction except in a single congregation: "the Power of Censure rests still in the Congregation where Christ placed [sic] it."¹

The New England Synod

For ultimately, the New England position about Synods rested not so much on the Biblical material as on their conviction that only a congregation was a church. Hence, as John Norton tersely summed up the colonial position, "that which is not a Church, can not exercise Church jurisdiction: A Synod is not a Church: Ergo."² The logical "place" labelled "visible church" was filled by the local congregation. To use the word "church" to refer to any other visible body was improper; moreover, if it were used to imply that some other body could exercise the functions which only belonged to a local congregation, it was downright wrong. Cotton, who seemed to have a higher doctrine of Synods than most of his colleagues, could go so far as to refer to a Synod as "a Church of Churches: for what is a Synod else but a Church of Churches?"³ But even he was speaking figuratively and apologetically, and would not have drawn from his figure of speech any of the inferences about Synodical power and authority which were drawn by Presbyterians, who saw the Synod as a Church.⁴ Furthermore, against this one figurative reference in

¹Hooker, Survey, IV. p. 19; cf. Mather and Thompson, Modest & Brotherly, p. 19.

²Norton, Responsio, p. 115. ³Cotton, Keyes, p. 49.

⁴See, e.g., Herle, Independency, p. 34.

Cotton must be placed the reiterated denials by New England divines that this title could be applied to a representative body, composed of delegates from various churches:

Wee have said, that unlesse it could be proved that in Scripture the name of a Church is given to a Synod, we are not to be blamed though we give not a Synod that name.¹

Because they believed that all the ordinances of God, including those once handled by the Temple and Sanhedrin (and not since annulled) now belonged to each local church² (the only species of "visible church"), they could not make sense of the Presbyterian idea that some of these ordinances could be handed to a Synod, which was not a church, and so had no right to them.³ They could accept the term "representative church" if it meant simply an occasional consultative body of "messengers" from the churches;

But if by a representative Church, is understood a Church strictly speaking, that is, a real Church, a Church which replaces another, representing it as its substitute, so that by virtue of delegation it has power to carry out the other's affairs, by the authority of God: in this sense we simply deny any representative Church.⁴

For the New Englanders, the Synod was not a Church; it had no independent existence. It was derivative in nature, doctrinal in function, dependent on the Word for its authority, and on the action of the churches and the magistrate for its sanctions.

The nature of a Synod.--The Synod was entirely derivative.

¹Mather, Reply, p. 22 (all italics).

²See Hooker, Survey, IV. p. 40; Welde, Answer, p. 14.

³See Mather, op. cit., chap. v.

⁴Norton, Responsio, p. 45 (translation mine).

Not being a species of "church" it had no church authority of its own, nor any right to rob the congregations of theirs.¹ It was a derived and secondary body, incapable of being the "first subject recipient" of any power, since it was "abstracted from the people."² They pointed out that in the Presbyterian system, Classes (and Synods) could only arise through "voluntary consociation,"³ which proved that their power was first in the congregations. Presbyterians admitted that their form of government depended on the voluntary union and consociation of the congregations in a given area:

these doe make Presbyteries, 1. A convenient number of Churches may be governed by one Colledge, or society of Elders. 2. Having ordinary conversing one with another. 3. Voluntarily upon these two grounds combining themselves in one society.⁴

The Presbyterian governmental system was based on the idea of voluntary political union; the theory of contract was influential here, as well as among Independents.⁵ They wondered why Independents could not do the same thing; why could not congregations covenant together into a Classis, just as Christians covenanted together to form a church;

¹See Cotton, Keyes, p. 58; Carter, "Presbyterian-Independent Controversy," p. 279f; M.S. to A.S., p. 46f; Thomas Welde (Answer, p. 14f) knew "no rule to set the Officers in the roome of their whole Church, and the Presbyterie in the place of all their Churches, to binde the one or the other to stand to their decrees."

²Cotton, Keyes, sig. B2 verso; cf. ibid., p. 31f; Browne, Booke which Sheweth, Df. 51, apud Dexter, op. cit., p. 109.

³Cotton, Way Cleared, I. p. 20.

⁴Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 319f.

⁵See Smectymnuus, Answer, p. 80f; Jus Divinum, p. 232; Hudson, Essence, p. 44.

why have not many Churches united as much power over every particular church within the union, as many members¹ united have over every person amongst themselves.

The answer was that by Apostolic precedent the form of a Synod (a Classis was not discussed, since there was no place for it in the Independent system) was not a covenant, or consociation, but a delegation of representatives; "but what is this to the giving those Officers generally a power of judicature in and over that Church: and a compound Presbyterie, in and over all their Churches?"² It was like saying that a group of men could unite their power of sight, and devolve in on two or three of their number to exercise for them. And it meant that a church which had complete jurisdiction when by itself, was deprived of some of that power when it acquired neighbour churches; "and by this meanes she sustaines losse by having neighbours."³

Samuel Hudson had to admit that a Classis or Synod "may well put on the notion of Ecclesia Orta,"⁴ a derived Church, in relation to the congregations which delegated members to it;

Yet I do not conceive that those particular Churches give either the office, or the power in actu primo, whereby those delegated Commissioners do act when they are met, but by such delegation they do evocate and call forth the exercise of that power which Christ hath annexed to their office habitually, in actum secundum.⁵

In his view, the power of a Synod came from a power which lay dor-

¹Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 47; cf. Herle, Independency, p. 39.

²Welde, Answer, p. 16 (misnumbered 18).

³Mather and Tompson, Modest & Brotherly, p. 4.

⁴Hudson, Vindication, p. 25; cf. p. 158f. ⁵Ibid., p. 25.

mant in every church officer, and was called forth by their delegation. Apollonius went further, claiming that "there is an authority and power of rule, belonging . . . to Churches joyned in Classes and Synods, which to particular Churches singly and severally belongeth not."¹ This power came, not from the churches, and not from the "virtual" power in the combining officers, but directly from God to a Synod as his institution (much as, say, the power of an Elder came not from the congregation, nor from the Classis, but directly from God who ordained the office).²

Against each of these theories about the origin and derivation of the judicial and legislative authority of a Synod (as a political union, as a union of "virtual" official powers, or as a separate ordinance of God) Congregationalists made the same objection. Presbyterians, they said, were giving their Synodical commissioners a new power, other than the power of their pastoral office. Schooled by many years of controversy in opposing the Episcopal office on the grounds that it was a human invention, an addition to the purity of Christ's polity, with a power (beyond that of a Pastor) for which there was no New Testament warrant, these men unsheathed the same sword against the power which Presbyterians claimed belonged to an officer when united in a Classis or Synod. Hooker gave one of the most telling strokes:

That the Elders who had speciall office, and the power of it in their proper charges, yet when by the combination of all the Churches they are to meet in a Classis, and have power put upon them to act in such things and in

¹Apollonius, Consideration, p. 91.

²See ibid., pp. 37f, 92.

such a manner, which they never had before; this is not now an office of a Pastor, but the power of a Commissioner, wholly distinct therefrom; and that is a humane creature of mans devising.¹

The Elders who combined in a Classis or Synod had no new office, he added, and therefore they could have no new power; by giving them a new power, Presbyterians implied that they had a new office.² And as all knew, it was by such steps as these that "Antichrist" had mounted up to his throne.

The function of a Synod.--For the New Englanders, a Synod functioned entirely as a dogmatic body. Presbyterians were fond of saying that the authoritative juridical power of a Synod was threefold: dogmatic, diatactic,³ and critic. The London Ministers thus explained this division:

1. Dogmatick, in reference to matters of Faith, and Divine Worship; not to coin new Articles of faith, or devise new Acts of Divine Worship: but to explain and apply those Articles of Faith and Rules of Worship which are laid down in the Word: and declare the contrary, errorrs, heresies, corruptions. . . . 2. Diatactick, in reference to externall Order and Politie, in matters Prudentiall and Circumstantiall, which are determinable according to the true light of Nature, and the Generall Rules of Scripture. . . . 3. Critick or censuring power . . . put forth, not in any Civill, but meerly in Spirituall Censures . . .⁴

Ultimately, the New England response to this was simply, "a Synod

¹Hooker, Survey, I. p. 119; cf. pp. 121, 122.

²See ibid., p. 122f; for his comparison of this with the Episcopal system, see p. 123f; IV. p. 46f.

³Probably derived from διατάσσω, "order, direct, command"; cf. ἡ διαταγή, "ordinance, direction"; τὸ διάταγμα, "edict, command."

⁴Jus Divinum, p. 217f; Hudson, in his Vindication, p. 160f, reproduced this passage with a few minor alterations.

is rather a teaching than a governing Church."¹ But there were specific objections to each part of the Presbyterian schema; we shall examine them in reverse order.

They rejected the "critic" or censuring power of a Synod: (1) because church jurisdiction belonged only to a church; (2) because the model Synod in Acts 15 did not censure, nor was there any New Testament example of a censuring Synod; (3) because if a Synod reversed the sentence of a congregation, it deprived the congregation of its rightful power, and if it did not, it was needless; and (4) because a Synod included laymen, who had no authority to pronounce or join in pronouncing censures, but only to approve and carry them out (this was an argument from the Presbyterian position).² This is the point at which Independents were the strongest; nearly every principle in their system prepared them to reject this kind of Synodical authority. They were quite certain that there was not a single hint in Scripture of such a power in any body other than the local church; all else was a usurpation. The most a Synod could do in this line was "admonish an offending Church or Presbyterie;" and, if need be, proceed "to determine to withdraw communion from them."³

¹Mather and Tompson, op. cit., p. 7; cf. Mather, Reply, p. 22.

²See Hooker, Survey, IV. pp. 45-52; Norton, Responsio, pp. 109-120; Stone, Congregational Church, sig. A3 verso et seq.

³Cotton, Keyes, p. 25; this sentence of "non-communion" was not regarded as an authoritative act of church power (see below, p. 257). Cotton's doctrine of the Synod seems rather 'high'; but in effect, his Synod had no more authority than did that of any of his New England colleagues.

The "diatactic" power of a Synod was "a power of making Canons and laws Ecclesiasticall, which may bind all the particular Churches of one Province or Kingdome to obey them."¹ Based on Paul's injunction to do all things "decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40), it gave to a Synod the right to choose one of a number of indifferent modes of performing the various church-acts, and establish it by legislation as the way these acts were to be performed in its area. Rathband described it well in a passage complaining of the way in which the New Englanders limited the Synod's authority:

they deny unto it . . . all power to make any particular rules or lawes in things indifferent (conducing to the better government of her selfe, and more orderly, and more edifying performance of Gods worship, and use of his Ordinances) according to the generall rules of Scripture in such cases provided.²

His report seems to be contradicted by Norton's statement that the Synod may

prescribe fixed canons and appointed rules, by which things not necessarily required by God for the regulation and rule of the Church, are prescribed by church power, according to general rules of Scripture from the maxims of natural law and holy prudence, for the edification of the Church and the order and decency of divine worship.³

But it is well to remember that Norton was doing the work of an apologist; in some matters he was prepared to come as close to Presbyterian teaching (in form of words) as belief would allow. And he followed this statement with the qualification that these

¹Apollonius, Consideration, p. 91; cf. p. 121.

²Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 28; cf. Cawdrey, Vindiciae, pp. 56-59, esp. "unity is much preserved by uniformity" (p. 59).

³Norton, Responsio, p. 133 (translation mine).

"canons" were not laws, that they were not a part of "worship" or cultus,¹ and that they were not binding on the individual churches.²

Presbyterians could support this "diatactic" power of the Synod from Acts 15 far better than they could its "critic" power. The Apostolic Synod manifestly did not carry out an ecclesiastical censure on anyone; but it did "lay upon you . . . these necessary things" (Acts 15:28), requiring, said the Presbyterians, the performance of indifferent things not demanded by Scripture (the Old Testament ceremonial laws having been abrogated since the death of Christ). But Cotton held that these injunctions were simply the application of a general rule of Scripture, well within the province of even an Independent Synod, and not requiring any "diatactic" power:

This eating with offence was a murther of a weak brothers soule, and a sin against Christ. 1 Cor.8.11.12. and therefore necessary to be forborn, necessitate praecepti, by the necessity of Gods Commandment.³

Concerning the "decently and in order" rule, Cotton denied that this gave the Church the right to legislate and impose things whose contrary was not indecent or disorderly; such as, to command a Minister to preach in a gown, which would prohibit him

¹By "worship" was often meant all necessary service of God (including church-discipline, administration, constitution, and government), which he alone may ordain, since he alone knows what honours him; to men is left the determination of such adjuncts as time, place, dress, posture, and the like. See Norton's succinct discussion of this in his Responsio, p. 128f.

²See ibid., p. 134; cf. Cotton, Way Cleared, I. p. 96.

³Cotton, Keyes, p. 27.

from preaching in a cloak;

For if he preach in a cloak, he preacheth decently enough, and that is all which the Apostles Canon reacheth to. In these things Christ never provided for uniformity, but onely for unity.¹

When it came to the "dogmatic" power of a Synod, "to explain and apply those Articles of Faith and Rules of Worship which are laid down in the Word,"² with this the New England divines could agree, with certain modifications. A Synod was a doctrinal body, but it was consultative and not governing, occasional and not standing. Synods, said Norton, rule "by determination, and not authoritatively, i.e., juridically."³ More will be said below concerning the doctrinal authority of the Synod; here we are concerned with the consultative and occasional nature of the New England Synod, and the resultant position taken concerning appeals.

The characteristic judgment of the New England divines was that a Synod was consultative: it was called into existence to answer questions.⁴ It had no authority to govern individual congregations, since it ceased to exist after it had answered the questions which had been asked it. Considered in this light, a Synod could not be a standing body; many proposals to institute "set meetings to order Church matters" were resisted in early New England.⁵ In spite of his relatively 'high' doctrine of a

¹Ibid., p. 28.

²Jus Divinum, p. 238.

³Norton, Responsio, p. 110 (translation mine).

⁴See ibid., p. 150; cf. Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 22; Hooker, Survey, I. p. 87; IV. p. 47.

⁵See Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 14; Winthrop, Journal, p. 139f.

Synod's authority,¹ it was John Cotton who most clearly described its occasional character:

But these Synods are not the ordinary standing Judicatories of the Church: neither do they convene, nor exercise their directive Power, but when the particular Churches lie under variance or offence, or are not yet settled in a way of Truth and Peace.²

A Synod might be called by a congregation in need, or by its neighbours; and the factor which decided the calling of a Synod was the absence in a congregation of "light and peace"; if their knowledge were not sufficient to decide a knotty question, or if they were stubbornly divided in their votes, or factious, they were to recognise their need and send for the "counsel and help of other churches, few or moe."³ The other occasion for the calling of a Synod was the scandalous corruption of a congregation, which could not be healed by the mere brotherly advice of other churches; in this case, it was the neighbour congregations who called the Synod (this was "by proportion" from Matthew 18:15ff).⁴

When a particular case was referred, by either of these methods, to a Synod for its judgment, its function did not become juridical; it remained doctrinal. Its task was to search out the truth, apply it in the particular case, and teach the church involved what it should do. This system envisaged that cases would be brought to a Synod before the congregation had made its decision; but there was also provision for appeals to

¹See Cotton, Keyes, pp. 47, 57.

²Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 20; cf. ibid., I. p. 95; Keyes, p. 57.

³Ibid., p. 23; cf. p. 47. ⁴See ibid., p. 24.

be made after the fact of an offensive decision (even so, the Synod could not reverse the church's action, but only advise it).¹ After the Synod had advised the congregation,

they are to leave the formall act of this censure to that authoritie which can onely execute it, placed by Christ in those Churches themselves; which if they deny to doe, or persist in their miscarriage, then to determine to withdraw communion from them.²

Presbyterians, preoccupied as they were with their prudential justifications for a system of graduated, authoritative courts of appeal,³ produced objections to the Congregational system which were not so much Scriptural as prudential and even pragmatic. They said that there should be appeals beyond the congregational level, since the light of nature taught that no one should be judge in his own cause. Congregationalists pointed out that some judicatory in the Presbyterian system would end up as final judge in its own cause, with no chance for appeal. Presbyterians could only reply that it was not fit for congregations to be the final judges, since they were more likely to err than Synods.⁴ This, of course, was the pragmatic argu-

¹See Norton, Responsio, p. 56.

²Cotton, Keyes, sig. A3 verso et seq. (italics inverted); cf. Mather and Tompson, Modest & Brotherly, p. 7.

³The right of appeal was "a thing common to all societies as societies, not Ecclesiasticall only, and not a positive law only, but dictated by the light of nature, right reason and necessity, and therefore is practised in all ages, nations, armies and societies." Hudson, Vindication, p. 165; cf. Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 423.

⁴See ibid., I. p. 456; Mather and Tompson, op. cit. p. 19f; Mather, Reply, pp. 61-65; Cawdrey, Vindiciae, p. 80.

ment; it was easily answered by the ~~common~~ dictum that all Synods could, and many did err. If liability to err was what prevented a judicatory from concluding a case, then no judicatory could conclude. The best solution, said the New Englanders, was to go only as far as Christ allowed (in Matthew 18:17), and let the congregation be the final court:¹

When we are enquiring in what Judicatory, the supremum of Church-power doth lye, it is not our best course to look for such an one as cannot erre: for such an one we shall never find, but to look out where God hath appointed it to lie, and therewith to rest contented.²

The authority of a Synod.--"Experience tells us," said Charles Herle to the Independents, "that Councillors without any authority are but foyles without point or edge to be plaid with, not trusted to in case of safety or defence."³ And Apollonius rejected out of hand the New England idea of a Synod which was entitled to use only "Counsell and Perswasion," and having only dogmatic power; whereas

the Churches of the Netherlands hold their Synods, endowed with authority and power Ecclesiasticall, which do so impose their decrees on particular Churches, that they permit not a private or particular Church to alter the order established by the Synods.⁴

Presbyterians did not realise that the New Englanders were only working out, in practice, Reformed principles which were part of Presbyterian theory. This theory rejected "the Papists tyran-

¹See Church-Government &c., I. p. 46f; Hooker, Survey, IV. p. 38.

²Mather and Tompson, op. cit., p. 14; cf. p. 17f; Stone, Congregational Church, sig. A3 verso.

³Herle, Independency, p. 44.

⁴Apollonius, Consideration, p. 99.

nicall Antichristian representative Church," which could bind conscience and faith by its decrees;

But this representative Church we acknowledge out of the holy Scriptures, viz. a company of Presbyters chosen by the multitude of the Church, which by authority and ecclesiasticall jurisdiction received from Christ is set over and takes care of the Church, and rules it by spirituall jurisdiction, and decrees made consonant to the Word of God; to whom the whole multitude of beleivers is bound to yeeld obedience, in all things which from the Word of God and by the power by Christ committed to them they decree.¹

In fact, no matter how much Protestant divines might say that a Synod could challenge obedience "formally" (that is, by virtue of being a Synod), the ultimate authority of a Synod for Protestants could only be "material" (that is, arising from the authority of the "matter" propounded by it, viz., the Word of God):

The power of Synods contended for, is . . . Not absolute, and infallible; but limited, and fallible: . . . all their Decrees and Determinations are to be examined by the touchstone of the Scriptures, nor are further to be embraced, or counted obligatory, then they are consonant thereunto.²

A Synod had "a proper Authoritative juridicall power," it was said repeatedly; but always with this rider: it was to be obeyed only "so farre as agreeable to the Word of Christ."³ It was the Law of God in Scripture which had ultimate authority. A Synod was to be obeyed because it propounded that Law; but a

¹Ibid., p. 38 (latter italics mine).

²Jus Divinum, p. 216f.

³Idem.

Synod might err.¹ Therefore, those under a Synod's jurisdiction must in the end have the right to examine a Synod's decrees against the Word, and obey God rather than men.² For example: Rutherford was very clear that if any judicatory forbade a Minister to do his duties, he "must act and contra-act to their unjust sentence, and not forbear for an hour."³

One feels that where Presbyterians were concerned, these principles about the Synod were honoured more often in theory than in practice. But Independents took them very seriously,⁴ and built them into their system of polity. They carried Reformation principles out to their logical conclusion. In New England, a Synod was to act "by way of Brotherly helpfulness with light held forth from Scripture in difficult cases."⁵ Even Cotton, who agreed with Presbyterians that a Synod had a "formal" authority, insisted that its only right to command came when it propounded things from the Word; it could not enjoin anything indifferent.⁶ A Synod, said Mather to Rutherford, may certainly "command obedience"; but only to the Word, not to its own au-

¹But Norton was hesitant: "that in reformed times the opinion of a particular church would be sounder than a Synodal opinion, is not at all easily granted; although it is not simply denied" (Responsio, p. 118; translation mine). Their millennial hope gave these divines a confidence which at times seemed to override the timidity of their theory.

²See ibid., pp. 230f, 237; Hudson, Vindication, p. 158f; cf. p. 179: "Clavis errans non ligat."

³Rutherford, Survey, Preface.

⁴See M.S. to A.S., p. 67.

⁵Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 46; cf. Cotton, Way Cleared, II. p. 20f; Church-Government &c., I. p. 63.

⁶See Cotton, Keyes, p. 27f; Noyes, Temple, p. 53f.

thority.¹ The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this was that the Saints have a liberty of rejecting and refusing whatsoever they shall find is not agreeable to the revealed mind and will of Christ in the Word, when it is charged on them as matters of faith, and required in conscience to yeeld subjection thereto.²

Congregations, concluded Hooker, were above Synods; for they sent them and they could refuse to accept their conclusions.³ But the problem was, how were peace, order, and truth to be preserved, if congregations were free to disregard the advice and even the commands of a Synod? New England was, after all, not an anarchy but a theocracy; it was not Rhode Island, refuge of religious liberty, but Massachusetts Bay, pattern for Puritan oligarchies.

The sanctions of a Synod.--In case of recalcitrance, the New England theocracy had two weapons in its armoury: non-communication, and the magistrate. Since a discussion of the role of the magistrate in New England Congregationalism will occupy the remainder of this chapter, this section will deal only with the power of non-communication.

In case a congregation refused to heed the godly advice of a Synod, the churches involved had power "to withdraw from them, the right hand of Fellowship, and no longer to hold them in the Communion of Saints, till they approve their Repentance."⁴ This

¹See Mather, Reply, p. 8.

²Bartlet, Model, p. 17: cf. Cotton, Way Cleared, sig. A4 recto.

³See Hooker, Survey, IV. pp. 47, 54.

⁴Cotton, True Constitution, p. 13.

meant that the offending congregation lost the following privileges with respect to its sister churches: (1) the right of its members to participate in the Lord's Supper elsewhere; (2) the right to dismiss its members by letter to other congregations; (3) the help of sisterly consultation with other churches; (4) the privilege of sending messengers to Synods; (5) the aid of other churches in its financial difficulties, and (6) the help and correction of admonition by other congregations when in error.¹ A good deal of debate went on over this whole question, which concerned what was admittedly a rare occurrence.²

The practice of non-communion puzzled Presbyterians, who could not, or would not, distinguish it from excommunication: "So that whiles they oppose Excommunication Synodically, they seem to establish it."³ Or, as Baylie put it,

when they have denied to Synods the power of these censures which God hath appointed, and finde themselves straightned by the absolute necessity of the matter, to take up againe either them or their equivalent.⁴

The Presbyterian argument for Synodal excommunication was based

¹These were the privileges of inter-communion; see Cotton, Way, pp. 102-109.

²See M.S. to A.S., p. 76; it would not be so rare in the Independent as in the Presbyterian system, since in the former individual cases improperly handled by a local congregation could not be dealt with save by withdrawing fellowship from the whole church.

³Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 48; cf. Cawdrey, Vindiciae, p. 43.

⁴Baylie, Dissvative, p. 114; Cawdrey did not find it a satisfactory equivalent: "For as for their withdrawing communion, it will be little regarded by an offending obstinate congregation" (op. cit., sig. **4 recto).

on an extrapolation from Matthew 18:17f, whereby a congregation was to be taken through the same degrees of the corrective process outlined in that text, until it was eventually excommunicated by a Synod, a "Church" of churches.¹ They tended to apply the same logic to the Independent position, and as a result they could not see why Synodal excommunication had to be replaced with this "new and doubtful" practice of non-communion. In fact, they could not see that there was any real difference in kind between the two acts.²

The reason for this was that there was no real difference in kind. The Presbyterian practice, and the Independent alternative of non-communion, were based on the same text, and deduced therefrom by the same device of "proportion": "looke what power one Brother hath over another in the same Church, the same power hath one Church over another in Brotherly communion."³ The difference lay entirely in the fact that in Independent polity, all churches were sisters, of equal power; no church, and no consociation of churches, could claim any authoritative power over a sister congregation. Churches could offer each other the right hand of fellowship (as they did, at the formation of a new church); but this was no act of power by one church over another. Likewise, it was no act of power to withdraw what had been offered.⁴

¹See Apollonius, Consideration, p. 130.

²See Hudson, Vindication, p. 242f.

³Cotton, True Constitution, p. 12; cf. p. 13, n. 2; M.S. to A.S., p. 76.

⁴See Cotton, Defence, II. p. 80.

Independents objected to the Presbyterian practice on the ground that there was no warrant for it: "Let them produce but one plaine Scripture for it,"¹ they challenged. But in fact, the same gauntlet could be thrown down before their own idea of non-communion; both practices were derived by making the same kind of inference from the same text, the only difference being in the prior assumptions used.

Yet in spite of these similarities, important differences remained. A Synod, in the Independent system, had no competence to act or counter-act in the case of an individual; it could deal only with a congregation.² Non-communion only cut a congregation off from communion with those other churches which decided to act on the Synod's recommendation, and withdraw their communion; not from all churches in the nation or in Christendom.³ And the ultimate difference was part of the very bedrock of the Congregational system:

that they should excommunicate whole Congregations . . . seemeth to us to be altogether impossible; For a Congregation being a Church, it hath communion within it self, out of which it cannot be cast, no more then cast out of it self.⁴

This internal communion the Synod or Classis "never gave, or had power to bestow."⁵

One advantage of this system, Independents felt, was that

¹Bartlet, Model, p. 46; cf. pp. 47, 73.

²See Hooker, Survey, IV. p. 21.

³See Welde, Answer, p. 65.

⁴Mather and Tompson, Modest & Brotherly, p. 6f.

⁵Welde, loc. cit.

a congregation was not tied to a Synod in which there might be ungodly or heretical Ministers and Elders; they could pick and choose whom they would call to sit in judgment on their case.¹ That this was not an unmixed blessing, the string of unheeded, reduplicated councils, and unsettled issues in later New England Congregationalism clearly demonstrates.² But it was the dream of the early Congregationalists that churches composed of fit matter, walking in truth and peace, would not need an authoritarian Synod to keep order amongst them:

For errors may be prevented, truth cleared, union of Churches in judgment preserved, and they kept from running in vain, and all neighbouring Churches may be consulted with in more weighty transactions, without this meeting in this juridicall manner.³

But it must be added that New England Congregationalists could afford to allow this brotherly dealing by Synods, without risking disorder; for they had a second line of defence. Behind the Synod (and sometimes even before it) stood the magistrate, the "nursing father" of the churches.⁴ And to him, they gave even more power in church matters than did the Presbyterians.⁵ In turning to a consideration of the magistrate's role in New

¹See Burton, Vindication, p. 21f.

²See, e.g., Dexter, Congregationalism, pp. 612-621; cf. Wertenbaker, Oligarchy, p. 73: "The weakness of the Congregational synod grew out of the fact that final authority did not reside in it, as it did in the Presbyterian Assembly, but in the individual Churches."

³Hooker, Survey, IV. p. 51.

⁴See Norton, Responsio, p. 118; Mather and Thompson, op. cit., pp. 27ff. The term "nursing fathers" is from Isa. 49:23, a text which was very popular with these divines.

⁵Cf. Apologeticall Narration, p. 18f.

England Congregational polity, we close this section on the Synod with one of Lechford's typically revealing comments on their way, about the interaction of religious and civil governments.

Speaking of the "advice" given by neighbouring Elders during some difficulties in three New England churches, he said:

It may be, it will be said, they did these things by way of love, and friendly advise. Grant that; But were not the councelled bound to receive good counsell? If they would not receive it, was not the Magistrate ready to assist, and in a manner ready, according to duty, to enforce peace and obedience? did not the Magistrates assist? and was not master K. sent away, or compounded with, to seek a new place at LI, master Doughty forced to the Island Aquedney, and master Blindman to Connecticot?¹

The Magistrate

"I never knew one contend earnestly for a toleration of dissenters, but was so himself: not any for their suppression, but were themselves of the perswasion which prevailleth," observed John Owen.² And behind the burning issue of toleration lay the delicate task of steering a safe (and sound) passage through the almost uncharted waters between the Scylla of Erastianism and the Charibdis of the Anabaptist view of the magistrate's relationship to the churches. Where one (influential in Parliament) would have put all church discipline in the magistrate's hands, the other (strong in the Army) would have allowed him no power circa sacra beyond what was necessary to the preser-

¹Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 54; for details of these incidents, see Felt, Ecclesiastical History, pp. 451-453, 445, 458.

²John Owen, "A Countrey Essay for the practice of Church-Government there," in his A Vision of Vnchangeable free mercy (1646), p. 65.

vation of purely civil peace and order.¹

The Independent Theory

The orthodox English Independent, if he was no Erastian, neither was he an advocate of some kind of separation between Church and State. That would have involved toleration; and that, in turn (most Englishmen felt), would have meant the sevenfold return of the Roman demon first exorcised by Henry VIII.² As a result, he held the thoroughly sound view that all the power a magistrate had concerning the Church, he had as a magistrate (whether Christian or not).³ This avoided both extremes: becoming a Christian did not add to the magistrate an Erastian power to administer church censures; nonetheless, some right and duty to be a "nursing father" to the Church was inherent in his office itself.⁴

English Independents accused Presbyterians of saying that the magistrate was bound to do what a Synod or Classis told him to do:

The Civill Magistrate is much beholding to the Presby-

¹A brief but excellent summation of the Erastian point of view is Lewis du Moulin's The Povver of the Christian Magistrate in Sacred things (1650). For an Anabaptist statement, see Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 4-6; cf. 12, 13.

²See George Macaulay Trevelyan, England Under the Stuarts (London, 1910), pp. 82, 90.

³See M.S. to A.S., pp. 48f, 56.

⁴See Thomas Cobbet, The Civil Magistrates Povver In matters of Religion (2d ed.; 1653), p. 48: "Pagans and other Rulers not regulated according to Gods Rules, are perfect Rulers, and have a perfect right to establish true Religion, and to make good our Lawes to that end; Albeit for want of light, they know it not, or for want of a better heart they doe it not."

ter, for giving of him a consecrated sword to fight the Presbyterian Battels; and for perswading him to pull out his own eyes, upon this presumption, that he shall see better with his.¹

They believed, on the contrary, that although a magistrate may call a council or Synod for help, yet he must search the Word himself to see if their decisions be true. When he finds the truth, he must require his people to obey it, while at the same time giving protection and liberty to all the godly, even if they dissent "in some small circumstantialls about the worship of God."² This, of course, did not involve a toleration of the spread of Judaism, Arianism, "Papisme," "or that Anabaptisme," or any other heresies and corrupt opinions; nevertheless, the magistrate had no power over the conscience, either to compel men to believe as he did, or to force them to join his church.³ When reminded of the fact that their New England brethren refused toleration to some who had come over to them, "because they differed a little from them in point of Discipline,"⁴ the English Independent answer was that the New Englanders had been wrong in so doing; and the, added that the same treatment was to be expected from "Presbyterian Greatness" when it came to power.⁵ This was not the only point at which the New Englanders were closer to Presbyterians than they were to their English Independent brethren.

¹M.S. to A.S., p. 33; cf. p. 57.

²Bartlet, Model, p. 24f; cf. pp. 23-36; M.S. to A.S., pp. 18, 33, 45, 53f.

³See Bartlet, op. cit., pp. 96f, 126f; Burton, Vindication, p. 39f; M.S. to A.S., pp. 55, 58, 61.

⁴Ibid., p. 102 (all italics). ⁵See ibid., pp. 102-104.

The Presbyterian Theory

Presbyterians believed that there must be power in the Church itself, by which internal peace and order could be preserved, no matter what the belief or attitude of the civil magistrate. Baylie saw that Independency could not avoid a kind of Erastianism above the congregational level, if heresy, schism, and disorder were to be avoided; and he objected that often a magistrate could not or would not fulfil this essential function;

Now all our Question is about the ordinary, the internall, the necessary remedies which Scripture ascribes to the Church within it selfe, as it is a Church even when the outward hand of the Magistrate is deficient or opposite.¹

Presbyterian divines were not, however, prepared to give the magistrate any power in sacris, any more than were the Independents:

Hee hath an objective, externall, and indirect power about Ecclesiasticalls. . . . Hee may politically, outwardly exercise his power about objects, or matters spirituall; but not spiritually, inwardly, formally act any power in the Church.²

There were two main reasons for this. First, the magistrate as such had not been given the keys by Christ, because the Church had had full power to govern itself before magistrates became Christian; and there was no Biblical warrant for giving up a part of that power to the ruler simply because of his conversion (which could add nothing to the duties of his office). And second, the civil and ecclesiastical powers were essentially different and therefore separate; it did not belong to the office of a magis-

¹Baylie, Dissvative, p. 215.

²Jus Divinum, p. 77; cf. pp. 45, 55f.

trate to be a church officer, because the power of civil office came directly from, and was exercised under God the Creator; whereas the power of church office was from and under Christ as Mediator.¹

In spite of these carefully-drawn boundaries, Presbyterians did not dream of saying (as did some extremists) that the magistrate was to have no power to enforce duties of the "first table" of the Law (i.e., those pertaining to man's relationship to God).² They followed "judicious Calvin" when he said, "this therefore is principally required of Kings, that they use the sword, wherewith they are furnished, for the maintaining of Gods worship."³ The powers of the magistrate concerning religion could be subsumed under three heads: defensive, diatactic, and compulsive.⁴ Defensively, the magistrate was to protect the Church both from persecution and from such things as heresy and profaneness; to encourage it by his authority and example; and to supply it with places for worship, maintenance for its Ministers, and schools and colleges for godly learning. Diatactically, he was to reform corrupt worship; to call Synods and councils to determine either how the Church was to be reformed, or how (once reformed) it was to be governed; and to enforce with the sword both

¹For these points, see ibid., sig. A4 verso, pp. 7, 78-90.

²See Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 20f; Prynne, Fresh Discovery, p. 47.

³Calvin on Amos 7:13, apud Jus Divinum, p. 44; cf. Wer-tenbaker, Oligarchy, p. 25.

⁴For this grouping, see Jus Divinum, pp. 69-76; cf. pp. 56f, 45f.

the Laws of God (of both "tables") and the decrees of Synods and councils (not as brutum agens, a 'mindless agent,' as in Roman dogma, but using his own discretion concerning the things decreed¹), ensuring that their determinations were carried out by those responsible.² And compulsively, he was to force men, ecclesiastics and others, to do their religious duties (i.e., those of the first table of the Law) under pain of punishment.³

It was just at this point, the responsibility of the magistrate for enforcing duties of the first as well as the second table, that the New England way proved helpful to British Presbyterians, rather than to their opposites. English Independents claimed a certain amount of liberty for their differences, and exhibited a corresponding disagreement with the Presbyterians as to the magistrate's right and duty to enforce the first table (ranging all the way to those who said he had nothing to do with it at all). Presbyterians pointed out to them that in New England, the magistrate supervised the gathering of churches, "banned the Familists &c. from amongst them," and even had the au-

¹Cf. Rutherford, Divine Right, p. 598: "neither magistrates nor any other, are to follow the judgement of the Church absolutely without limitation, and because they say it."

²This included what Independents would not grant, and what Presbyterians demanded: uniformity in worship and unity in government (see Hudson, Vindication, p. 15). Faced with the reluctance of English Independents to observe the Westminster standards, Baylie grieved "that all our covenanted uniformity must be resolved into the free-will or erroneous conscience of every private man" (Dissvasive, p. 116).

³See Rutherford, Survey, p. 99: "our Divines say, The Magistrate may civilly in his way compel to the means of Salvation, the baptized ones especially, both to hear, and to eat and drink at the Lords Table in some true Church."

thority to execute heretics, blasphemers, and idolaters.¹

The New England Way

Looking back on the beginnings of the New England oligarchy, John Cotton had this to say:

So not much after [arriving in New England], this especially we learned from the practice of the Church polity which we began to exercise here, that Church polity can agree very well with civil polity . . . And this seemed a weighty Testimony to prudent men, that the discipline which we profess can be established with public authority, with no sign of schism in the Church, and without danger of sedition in the Republic.²

For the New England way was not just a church polity. It was a complete way of life, a Bible Commonwealth, a small coterie of saints united by covenant in churches carefully modelled on the New Testament "pattern," and set like gems into a Christian state, whose laws were based on divine Law, and whose rulers were the pick of the elect. And in spite of the differences between New and Old England, the colonial view of the relationship between the magistrate and the churches was surprisingly similar to that held by the Presbyterians; this becomes clear if the same framework is used to outline each system.

A magistrate, as such, had no ecclesiastical power;³ nor did the church derive any power from him to do its work. The church was independent of the magistrate in the sense that its

¹See Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 20f; Hudson, Essence, p. 48; Baylie, Dissvative, p. 129; Hollingworth, Certain Queres, p. 25f.

²In Norton, Responsio, sig. A4 verso et seq. (translation mine).

³See Cobbet, Civil Magistrate, p. 13f.

proper, spiritual power of jurisdiction came directly from Christ; it was only "subject to the power of the sword in matters which concern the civill peace."¹ The reasons were: (1) Christ has given final ecclesiastical authority only to those members of the church who are chosen by the church for such a function; but the magistrate as such was not necessarily a member of the church;² and (2) "the power of the keys is far distant from the power of the sword, and . . . the one of them doth not intercept, but establish the execution of the other";³ the magistrate's power was only indirectly from the Mediator, whereas that of the Elders was directly from him.⁴ So strictly was this observed in New England, that it was decided quite early that the same person could not be both magistrate and Elder simultaneously.⁵

When William Rathband accused many of the New England divines of holding that the magistrate had no competence in matters of religion, Thomas Welde answered heatedly, "let him know, and all others, that all the Churches with us doe abhorre that vile opinion."⁶ In fact, New England Congregationalism, as it was originally established, saw the magistrate as an integral, func-

¹Cotton, Keyes, p. 50; cf. Norton, Responsio, p. 147; Noyes, Temple, p. 58.

²See Norton, op. cit., p. 148. ³Cotton, Way, p. 19.

⁴See Norton, op. cit., p. 153; Ames, Marrow, I. xix. 31; but cf. Cobbet, op. cit., p. 47.

⁵See Winthrop, Journal, p. 38.

⁶Welde, Answer, p. 67; cf. Apologeticall Narration, p. 18.

tional part of the system.¹ The magistracy (even when held by a heathen) was a spiritual office, and the magistrate as such was to be concerned with the spiritual well-being of his people;² any who seriously proposed any kind of Church-State separation were likely to end up in Rhode Island. The magistrate's very concern with civil peace was seen as involving him in certain well-defined duties circa Ecclesiastica.³ Magistrates "are keepers of both Tables, and are so to look that all the Commandments of God be observed."⁴ We shall examine the New England magistrate's duties concerning the Church under the three heads used by the London Ministers: defensive, diatactic, and compulsive.

The defensive responsibility of the magistrate was to "provide, that all places may be furnished with preaching Ministers," to ensure that they had sufficient maintenance, to see that the Word could be freely preached without opposition, to allot land to each church, and to squelch heresy and schism.⁵ The extent of the magistrate's power in these last two duties is clearly etched in two passages from the Cambridge Platform:

¹It would be well for those who look to the primitive New England way as a model for their polity, to recall that the fathers of that way went over to found, not just churches, but a commonwealth.

²See Cobbet, Civil Magistrate, p. 63.

³See Norton, Responsio, p. 148f; Noyes, Temple, p. 58f; Cotton, Keyes, p. 50; Cobbet, op. cit., pp. 58, 66f; Eliot, Christian Commonwealth, p. 21.

⁴Idem; cf. Cambridge Platform, xi. 4, xvii. 6.

⁵See Cotton, Canticles, p. 43f; Cobbet, Civil Magistrate, p. 16; Norton, Responsio, p. 146; Cotton, Way, p. 6; Noyes, Temple, p. 54; cf. Ames, Conscience, IV. iv. 12-15.

Idolatry, blasphemy, heresy, venting corrupt and pernicious opinions that destroy the foundation, open contempt of the word preached, profanation of the Lord's day, disturbing the peaceable administration and exercise of the worship and holy things of God, and the like, are to be restrained and punished by civil authority.

If any church, one or more, shall grow schismatical, rending itself from the communion of other churches, or shall walk incorrigibly or obstinately in any corrupt way of their own, contrary to the rule of the word; in such case the magistrate is to put forth his coercive power, as the matter shall require.¹

These two paragraphs, and especially the last one, make it clear that New England Congregationalism was using the magistrate to supply a lack in its own polity; and the question which naturally arises is, what were to be its remedies against heresy and schism "when the outward hand of the Magistrate is deficient or opposite"?² It is true that Presbyterians required much the same sort of duties from their magistrate; nevertheless they insisted that their polity should be complete in itself, as able to function under a heathen, or indifferent magistrate, as under an active, Christian one. But the New England polity was incomplete without the strong hand of the Christian magistrate; as Thomas Welde, Pastor of Roxbury (New England), put it, "none are more dependent upon Magistracy than those (they call Independents)."³ The very peace and order of the Church depended on the

¹Cambridge Platform, xvii. 8 & 9; cf. [Massachusetts, General Court], The Book of the General Lawes and Liberties (Cambridge [New England], 1648), pp. 19f, 24. "So delightfull and contentfull, and pleasing to the great God, are such acts of politicall Justice by the civill Sword, upon such as are grossly corrupt in matters of Religion; It is to him as a Sacrifice, as a Supper" (Cobbet, op. cit., p. 18). Cf. Baynes, Diocesans Tryall, p. 68.

²Baylie, Dissvasive, p. 215.

³Welde, Answer, p. 35.

magistrate; if, said Thomas Cobbet, a Synod or Assembly should be corrupt in the Major part of it, who must Authoritatively reduce them into order? not an Universall Bishop as the Pope, nor an ecumenicall Council . . . Nor the Minor part of the Church Officers there met . . . now the Civill Magistrate, or none upon Earth, in an orderly way must help.¹

The possibility of the corruption of the magistrate was one which these divines never seriously considered.² And in any event, "from the abuse of a lawfull power or privilege, to reason against the use thereof, is not right or regular."³

The diatactic, or ordering power granted to the magistrate by the New Englanders was also an application of principles held by the Presbyterians, although more thoroughly carried out across the water. He was responsible, within his realm, for "the establishment of pure Religion, in doctrine, worship, and government, according to the word of God: as also the reformation of all corruptions in any of these."⁴ In order to fulfil this essential function, "all Rulers must be skilful in the Scriptures";⁵ New Englanders were certain that the "light breaking forth from the Word" was of such clarity that a Christian magistrate with a good grasp of logic could hardly fail to discern the true pattern for the Church. Furthermore, they seemed to feel that if he

¹Cobbet, op. cit., p. 57.

²See ibid., p. 75; here, the "regulated" magistrate is seen as being less likely to err than a Synod.

³Ibid., p. 82.

⁴Cotton, Keyes, p. 50; cf. Hooker, Survey, IV. pp. 16, 57 (misnumbered 75).

⁵Eliot, Christian Commonwealth, p. 22.

simply did what Ministers told him to do, he might easily be led astray.¹ The measure of the colonial trust in the magistrate's power to act correctly in matters concerning the churches is shown clearly in this sentence, which is echoed again and again in New England writings:

In some cases of a religious nature, as manifest heresie, notorious blasphemy, &c. the Civill power may proceed, Ecclesia inconsulta, and that by the judgement of all the Ministers.²

In doubtful cases, they felt he ought to refer matters to some of the Ministers, or call a Synod (John Norton, however, felt that the magistrate should not take the initiative unless the churches were corrupt; normally, he was bound to consult a Synod³). But although these divines agreed with Cobbet that the magistrates "are bound in conscience to follow what they [the church officers] according to God do clear up to be his mind,"⁴ nevertheless the responsibility for deciding on and enforcing the religion to be practised within his domain was ultimately the magistrate's. He called Synods (and nominated their members) for decisions on these matters; he could demand an account of their way at the churches' hands (although they could not demand the same at his⁵); and he could intervene in the pro-

¹See Hooker, Survey, IV. p. 57; of course, this doctrine was Popish, as well (see Cobbet, op. cit., p. 74).

²Welde, Short Story, p. 46; cf. Cotton, Way Cleared, I. p. 67; Felt, Ecclesiastical History, p. 272.

³See Norton, Responsio, p. 151f.

⁴Cobbet, Civil Magistrate, p. 67.

⁵See Felt, Ecclesiastical History, p. 329.

ceedings of a Synod.¹ He supervised the gathering of churches, and it was illegal to form a congregation without his cognisance.² He could also "circumstantiate" church meetings, lectures, fasts, and thanksgivings; "What the Kings of Israel could do as Magistrates in Israel, that is permitted now in Magistrates by Laws of Christ."³ It was his task, as well, to make laws which were in accord with and were "Civill Sanctions" of the laws of God, both explicit and implicit,⁴ and to enforce the conclusions of Synods, if in harmony with the Word.

The compulsive power exercised by the New England magistrate showed little, if any difference from that claimed for his English counterpart by Presbyterians. John Eliot summed it up admirably:

Hence they are keepers of both Tables, and are so to look that all the Commandments of God be observed, as to compel men to their undoubted duty, and punish them for their undoubted sins, errours and transgressions.⁵

It need only be added that in spite of the fact that no one was to be compelled to become a church member (for he could not do so

¹See Cotton, Keyes, pp. 50-52; Hooker, Survey, IV. p. 56; Winthrop, Journal, p. 138.

²See Lauues and Liberties, p. 18.

³Noyes, Temple, p. 60.

⁴See idem; Cotton, Canticles, p. 40; Cobbet, op. cit., p. 50f; but he could not "make Church Laws, so called, under pain of Excommunication, to be by virtue of their Authority executed by Ecclesiasticall persons" (ibid., p. 52); cf. pp. 66, 79.

⁵Eliot, Christian Commonwealth, p. 21; cf. Noyes, Temple, p. 60; Cotton, Keyes, loc. cit.; magistrates were keepers of both "tables" of the Law on the ground that they could certainly enforce the second; "and why not . . . the former; both being equall in this, that they are both Gods Tables" (Cobbet, op. cit., p. 74)

unless he could satisfy the church of his regeneracy), yet the magistrate was to compel men to "attend the Ordinances," that is, to come to hear the Word preached, that they might perhaps come to the knowledge of Christ.¹ It caused considerable irritation amongst some inhabitants of New England, that they were forced under pain of fine and imprisonment to attend public worship, and in some towns to contribute to the Ministers' salary, and yet were denied the Sacraments for themselves and their children.²

It is at the point of the magistrate's authority in religious matters that the difference between English and New English Independents becomes most clear. In Old England, they sued for toleration, and, what was stranger still in that era, when in power they granted a measure of it to others. But in the isolated wilderness, that little Christian Israel on the edge of nowhere, the magistrate kept a tight hand on the reins. Churches (after 1636) had to ask his approval to gather and swear their covenant;³ heretics were often dealt with by him, ecclesia incon-
sulta, by finding some civil charge to level against them;⁴ fran-

¹See Hooker, Survey, III. p. 3; Lauues and Liberties, p. 20. (the fine for non-attendance was five shillings); it was the magistrate who even provided for the evangelisation of the Indians (see ibid., p. 29).

²See Child, New England's Jonas, p. 11f; Gorton, Simplicities Defence, "To the Reader"; cf. Lauues and Liberties, pp. 9, 20.

³See Welde, Answer, p. 32; we are speaking principally of Massachusetts Bay.

⁴See Welde, Short Story, Preface; cf. Welde, Answer, p. 13f.

chise was limited to church members;¹ English common law was often laid aside in favour of "Moses his judicials" interpreted by sanctified logic;² and, last but by no means least, they were "not yet perswaded that the chief Magistrate should stand a Neuter, and tolerate all Religions."³ Indeed, both by their own testimony and the testimony of those who went over to them seeking a "wide doore of liberty" for their own opinions, William Campbell is right when he says, "New England Congregationalism was no more tolerant than Scottish Presbyterianism."⁴

In fact, so many were the similarities beneath superficial differences; so strangely did different methods tend in the same ultimate direction, and even produce the same results, that one cannot help regretting the bad weather which turned Robert Blair's ship back from its intended journey to New England. He lived to become a Covenanter. But he might have lived to understand the similarities between, and even to do somewhat to reconcile,

¹See Winthrop, Journal, p. 328 (this was not true in Connecticut; there, the only requirement was "an oath of fidelity declaring for belief in the Trinity"; see Charles M. Andrews, "On Some Early Aspects of Connecticut History," The New England Quarterly, XVII [March-December, 1944], 10).

²See Winslow, Hypocrisie, p. 23; cf. pp. 15, 17; Miller, New England Mind, p. 429. See John Cotton, An Abstract or [sic] the Lawes of New England (1641); Cotton was head of the committee appointed to draw up "a body of laws," which he did with the help of Nathaniel Ward, presenting them to the General Court in Oct., 1636. From fear of the English reaction, this was never adopted, although it had great influence. For the laws of Massachusetts, see Lauues and Liberties.

³Hooker, Survey, I. p. 13.

⁴Campbell, Triumph, p. 114; cf. Howgill, Heart of New England, p. 40; Gorton, Simplicities Defence, p. 38 margin.

two great polities.¹

But we conclude with one of the most provocative sentences in the literature about these polities; in speaking of the New Jersey Congregationalists, Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker makes this remark:

In the end they went over to Presbyterianism, seeking in its centralized form of Church organization the strength which in New England was had from the state.²

¹See DNB, s.v. See also Winslow, Hypocrisie, p. 100: "So also 'tis well known, that before these unhappy troubles arose in England and Scotland, there were divers Gentlemen of Scotland that groaned under the heavy pressaries of those times, wrote to New-England to know whether they might freely be suffered to exercise their Presbyteriall government amongst us. And it was answered affirmatively they might: and they sending over a Gentleman to take a view of some fit place; A River called Meromeck neare Ipswich and Newberry aforesaid, was shewed their Agent, which he well liked, and where wee have since four townes settled, and more may bee for ought I know, so that there they might have had a compleate Presbytery and whither they intended to have come: but meeting with manifold crosses being half Seas thorow they gave over their intendments, and as I have heard these were many of the Gentlemen that first fell upon the late Covenant in Scotland."

See Simpson, Puritanism, p. 68: "The Presbyterian impulse finds its fullest satisfaction in Calvin's Geneva, in John Knox's Scotland, or in the covenanted community of New England, if the New Englanders would only realize that God is not a Congregationalist but a Presbyterian. In each case the drive is to reduce the state to a police department of the church" (cf. p. 40). It would be better to say, of New England, that the drive was to exalt the state as the guardian of the church.

²Wertenbaker, Oligarchy, p. 72; see the careers of the two Abraham Piersons, father and son, DNB and DAB, s.vv.

CONCLUSION

Modern Congregationalism is a legitimate outcome of a consistent application to church polity of the principles of the Reformation.

--Walker, Creeds, p. 1

It is not too bold to say that early New England Congregationalism was seen by its founders as the inception of the Millennium. The Reformation, for them, was no human movement. It was the beginning of the end-time rebirth of the pure Apostolic Church. It was the gathering swell of the irresistible apocalyptic wave which broke finally on the shores of New England. Whatever the New England churches may have seemed to their members in later generations, in the beginning they were the Bride of Christ, entering the thousand years' betrothal which was to precede the marriage supper of the Lamb. The modern historian cannot share (although he must not forget) the sense of exultation with which the New Englanders thought of their "way" as the consummation of the Reformation; but it is certainly true that some of the doctrines of the Reformers found their logical outcome in early New England Congregationalism.

It is this interpretation of Congregationalism which is most helpful in analysing what is revealed by a study of the book- and pamphlet-warfare between Presbyterians and New England Congregationalists in the mid-seventeenth century. Seen in this light, the Presbyterian reaction is rather like that of a father,

outraged at the results when his children put some of his own beliefs into practice. Protestant views about Scripture and history, about the doctrine of election and the religious duties of the magistrate, all came to their logical conclusion in New England. If the result sometimes horrified Presbyterians, and provoked intense criticism of what their "brethren" had done, this very attack, and the Congregational response, reveal a great deal about the two systems, and even about Protestantism itself.

Of all the presuppositions which these divines had in common, by far the most important was their view of Scripture. New England Congregationalism was the logical result, in church polity, of the Protestant emphasis on the supreme authority of the Word of God, the unflinching practical trust in its all-sufficiency. The millennial rule of Christ was realised when the process begun by Luther was completed: when every intermediary, Pope, Bishop and Presbytery, was torn away, and Christ himself ruled each congregation--in his Word. This (and not a prudential desire to find a 'better' polity) was the ultimate reason for Congregationalism. Ministers remained over each church, not to stand between the congregation and its Lord, but because they had the God-given gifts of education and logical training by which the will of God was to be deduced from his Word. In spite of an intense doctrine of personal conversion, there was no concept of immediate inspiration (the treatment of Anne Hutchinson stands silent witness to that): only the Apostles had had such inspiration, and their revelations were now contained in Scripture.

It was this trust in Scripture which led divines of that

age to the conviction that Christ must have provided his Church with the pattern of government he wanted it to follow, and that this pattern must be set down in the Word. This belief has haunted Protestantism ever since, in spite of the fact that it is illogical and unprovable. Nor can it be proved that, if there were such a pattern, it would be obligatory for the Church in all ages to follow it. But these beliefs were a logical outcome of the Reformation view of Scripture; and, ironically, these very assumptions prevented a really competent historical investigation of the New Testament evidence, and hindered, rather than helped the recovery of the chimeric Apostolic pattern.

Moreover, it was only this deep trust in the written Word (to an extent incomprehensible to most moderns) which originally made Congregationalism itself possible. Without this trust, it would not have been possible for these children of an authoritarian age to abandon all authority beyond the congregational level (except for the episkope of the magistrate; and even this was only possible because the "regulated" magistrate had the all-sufficient Word in his hands). With this trust, no superior ecclesiastical authority was needed; only a civil authority, to enforce (not the decisions of Synods, as such, but) the precepts of Scripture. This trust in the Bible pervaded all areas of the church's life. It was Christ himself who, through the offences and penalties listed in Scripture, censured offenders; the Elders only pronounced that censure. In cases of offence, laymen were heard because they might bring "light from the Word." And if a man was censured contrary to the Word, other churches might

have fellowship with him without any recission by his own congregation; for the censure had never actually taken place. Likewise, it was Christ who, by the qualifications mentioned in the Bible, instituted or "ordained" officers in his Church; congregations simply looked for a man with these qualifications, and ratified Christ's choice for themselves by election and ordination. A congregation had the right to censure and even depose their Minister; but if (especially in the latter case) they proceeded contrary to the precepts of the New Testament, the man was held to be still a Minister to that flock. In the same way, when admitting members, churches looked for the "marks" which Scripture demanded, the signs of a visible saint, which indicated that the applicant was already (visibly) accepted by the Lord. A Synod assembled simply to search out the truth which was already in the Word; this could then be applied, with Christ's authority, to specific cases of doubt and difficulty.

The Word of God was for them the principle of their visible communion, their unity, and their orthodoxy; and it was the means by which these things were achieved. New England has been called a theocracy, a christocracy, an oligarchy; it might better be termed a bibliocracy. Its belief that it was the culmination of the millennial recovery of the pure primitive Church had this much of truth, at any rate: it was the working-out, in the realm of church polity, of some of the most distinctive themes of the Reformation. For some, this will be enough to recommend the congregational principle to whole-hearted acceptance; for others, it will mean asking whether these themes can in fact

be applied to polity; for others, it may even mean doubting the validity of the themes themselves. In any case, it remains true that those who carried some of the age's beliefs to their logical conclusions, have done a great service for later generations.

The New England way was not only an incarnation of certain aspects of Reformed theology, it was also the result of a diligent application of the principles of current logic to the science of polity. What emerges from a study of the Presbyterian-Congregational conflict over the nature of the Church, is that two themes were especially determinative for the latter group: Ramism, and the idea of the invisible Church. Ramism was a way of thinking which grew out of the problems inherent in teaching logic to teen-age boys; it also owed something to the visual cast of thought which arose with the advent of printing. It was essentially a visual technique to aid the memory, and it pervaded all logical schools. It was this habit of mind which seized upon the idea of the invisible Church, advanced in the Protestant polemic with Rome, and made it visible.

First it became visible as an idea. In the terms of the standard Ramist dichotomy, there were two species of Church, visible and invisible. One of the attributes of the invisible Church was its universality; it was world-wide: it consisted of the people of God, his elect, out of every nation in the world. Therefore, universality could not be an attribute of the visible church as such. It must be local, not world-wide. There was no "place" in this system for any other kind of Church. All of this was articulated in the conflict over the Catholic Visible

Church, wherein the New Englanders were finally driven to the absurdity of saying that the Catholic Visible Church was a genus, of which the species were the local congregations. Yet the fact that these ideas were drawn forth to justify an already-established church system, should not be taken to mean that it was some other set of ideas which produced the system; the same habits of mind which are evident in the rationale, were behind the system as well. Congregationalists arrived at their system of polity partly because any other was, to a Ramist, logically inconceivable.

Presbyterians thought of the visible Church as a "great integral." In this, their position was naturally weaker than that of the Congregationalists: this idea was partly Biblical and partly practical, but (at least in Ramist terms) hardly logical. This may mean that further reform is needed; or it may mean that this (or any other) logical category is inadequate when dealing with the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ, and this is "a great mystery" (Eph. 5:32); reducing it to a logical concept (whether genus, integrum, or species) can help men to understand and even visualise it, but it is also liable to lead them to think of it as a thing in itself. And as William Ames (himself a great Ramist) said,

Christ hath so instituted the Church, that it always depends upon himselfe as upon the head, so that if it be distinctly considered without Christ, it is not a complete body.¹

Intercommunion, in this Church, depended on the theory that

¹Ames, Marrow, I.xxxii.25.

all congregations were species of one genus, rather than on the reality of membership in one Body. But this is obviously a contrived explanation, necessitated by an intercommunion which was already a fact, yet did not fit the theory. Presbyterians were constantly pointing out that intercommunion was impossible in New England theory, and that the fact that it existed was proof that there was a Catholic Visible Church of which all Christians were members. Be that as it may, this theory of the Church, in which intercommunion is impossible except by a logical trick, is the logical culmination of the belief that one 'part' of Christ's Body ought to (or even can) be split off from another, for the sake of 'purity'; a belief which gained popularity with the Reformation. Thus, in New England polity, one congregation was sealed off from another; each Minister belonged only to his own flock; and each local church became a little, complete, independent civitas Dei. One result of this view was a virtual paralysis of evangelism. Here was a noble passion for the purity of the Church, but not for the sake of its mission to the world.

A second tendency with regard to the idea of the invisible Church was that of making it visible in the congregations, or of seeing the local church as a manifestation of the mystical Church. This may be seen as a logical outcome of the individualistic view of the doctrine of election. This doctrine (which Calvin had significantly placed next-to-last in Book III of the Institutes--the book on faith--to explain why "all do not indiscriminately embrace the fellowship of Christ offered in the Gospel") became the rallying point of later Reformed theology, and radically af-

fects the doctrine of the Church. It led naturally to the view that these elect individuals, whoever they were, actually formed the true, catholic, mystical, and invisible Church of all places and ages, known only to God. Those who were truly in God's Covenant were God's true Church. This was bound to influence the doctrine of the visible Church. Presbyterians, who retained the idea that the visible Church should embrace all within its bounds, and (with some limitation) offered Word and Sacrament to all, yet believed that these ordinances were truly given only to, and for, the elect. With Presbyterians, this was a foreign idea inserted into an inherited pattern of the visible Church. But with Congregationalists, the visible church was rebuilt in obedience to this idea. If there existed throughout the world a body of men and women who were truly God's saints, then it was obligatory to find them, gather them, and form the Church of them, and of them alone; for they alone were the Church. What more fitting way to gather these elect, this Church, than by the preaching of the Word? and what more appropriate way to form this "fit matter" into the church, than by a covenant? Thus, in the Congregational ideal, the matter and form of the visible and invisible Church are precisely the same: "express open covenanting" by "real SAINTS uttering in discourse the breathings of the Holy Spirit, and experience of conversion."¹

There is nothing so obvious in a study of early New England Congregationalism as is the rapid decay of this ideal when put into practice; so that in just thirty years we are confronted

¹Cotton, Way Cleared, sig. A3 verso.

with that unscriptural and unheard-of end result, the Half-Way Covenant. But right from the beginning, Presbyterian divines had been protesting that neither the ideal of "fit matter" nor its close relation, the congregational covenant, could be found in the New Testament. And New Englanders had to admit that these pivotal practices were not based on precept, but on inference. The result of these things was that the visible and invisible Churches moved farther and farther apart. New England churches stopped looking for real saints, and asked instead for marks of visible holiness; they acknowledged that the Gospel Covenant and the congregational covenant were two different things. Ironically, the upshot of this system, which had its roots in the dream of identifying the visible with the invisible Church, was that the two became unrelated: sanctification was no sign of regeneration, nor was membership in the visible church any guarantee of citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. And the ultimate absurdity was that Baptism admitted its recipients to neither Church. Nothing on this earth was any assurance to the Christian that he was one of the elect.

The dream had been to build a church of saints, of men chosen by God. The result was quite different. It based the church on the selection of men chosen by other men on the basis of their apparent sanctity; this, Presbyterians insisted, was building on sand. It substituted for the rule of Christ, the guesswork of men; and for the work of Christ, human piety. And polity cannot be based on piety. If anything should prove the truth of this maxim, it is the first half-century of the New Eng-

land way. Its failure (epitomised in the adoption of the Half-Way Covenant¹) was the direct result of the attempt to incarnate the invisible Church in visible congregations; a failure which forces the questions, is such an incarnation possible? is this the proper way to construct a church polity? and (perhaps most important) is there any such thing as the "invisible Church," as these divines pictured it?

The idea of the church covenant owed a good deal to the current concept of the Social Contract. It was only natural that the concomitant idea of the Contract of Government should have a strong appeal to those whose minds were exercised in finding out a way to derive ecclesiastical authority to church officers, when no authority could come from any source beyond the local congregation. All Christendom agreed that the 'key' texts (Matt. 16:19 and 18:18) described the donation of authority by Christ to the Church. The Protestant problem was how to deny that these keys were given to Peter and the Apostles in such a way that they had to pass lineally to their historical successors, and still preserve the texts as authorisation for the authority of Protestant Pastors (and Ruling Elders) in Word, Sacraments, and ecclesiastical government. Thus, the Protestant solution had to involve some idea of authority 'descending' di-

¹The only possible alternative, given this view of the Church, is the adoption of believers' Baptism. One feels that if the New Englanders had not been so eager to be orthodox, or if Anabaptism had not been regarded as such a desperate heresy, it would have been adopted in New England. The logic of their position points directly to it. This is one of the few areas in which the New Englanders did not carry a belief out to its logical conclusion.

rectly to the officers from Christ. Yet in practice, the conveyance (or authorisation) of this power by ordination performed by other officers (retained because of Scripture, custom, and good order) meant retaining some appearance of a historical succession. It was Congregationalists, once again, who carried theory out into the realm of polity. The high-water mark here was Cotton's Way (together with Hooker's Survey), where the key texts, taken together, are seen as Christ's donation of all church authority to true believers, covenanted together in one congregation. It was by their agency, in election and its "consummating adjunct" ordination, that authority for government was passed to the congregational Elders. That this theory was designed as a way of transmitting authority to church governors, and not in the interests of ecclesiastical democracy, seems to be sufficiently demonstrated by an examination of the way New England Elders actually governed, and by the fact that their authority was usually thought of as coming to them directly from Christ, not from the people.

In two important respects, however, New England theory about the keys was contradicted in practice. Presbyterians objected that lay-ordination was unknown to the New Testament (as, they added, was any idea of the primacy of election over ordination). And in New England before the end of the century, lay-ordination was a thing of the past. This suggests that in their eyes, it was not the relation of Pastor to flock which was primary to the essence of the Ministry; far more important, for them as for Protestantism in general, was the relation of the

Ministry to the Word. In abandoning "plebian" (and repeated) ordinations, the New England way was not being false to its genius; for its primary theological emphasis was that all authority in the Church is derived from Christ in his Word. This is a basic Protestant affirmation: that the true Apostolic succession is maintained by those who are successors to the Apostles' doctrine, by whatever agency this succession was evaluated and formally recognised.

Far more serious than this defection from the early idea of the derivation of the keys of government, was the decline of the New England churches into a kind of congregational mon-episcopacy. The New Testament justification for the congregational way rested, ultimately, on the belief that in every city there had been just one congregation, ruled by one presbytery. When the only Elder in a congregational church was one single Minister, that church had ceased to conform to the primitive "pattern," as Independents saw it. The presbytery was gone, and a single bishop remained. And this situation was unwarrantable by congregational principles, contradictory to basic theory, and open to many of the same objections which both Presbyterians and Independents had brought against the diocesan mon-episcopacy of the English Church.

The understanding of this point is vital to any appreciation of the fundamental differences, as well as relationships, between these two polities. The differences between them go back to the question, whether or not, in Apostolic times, the Christians in each city had been one congregation (that they had had

but one presbytery, was generally agreed). That this question, in the light of modern scholarship, is both irrelevant and unanswerable, and in view of the historical development of these polities, largely meaningless, should not obscure the fact that it lies at the bottom of the differences between the systems. It is especially important for an understanding of the differences between the Presbyterian and Congregational Synods.

Here again, in the doctrine of the Synod, it was Congregationalists who worked out the implications of Reformed and Presbyterian principles for polity. For Reformed divines, the decrees of a Synod had no authority beyond that of the Word; obedience to a Synod was always "in the Lord," that is, a Synod was to be obeyed only as it promulgated the express or implicit commands of Scripture. It is in Congregational polity that this was carried to its logical conclusion, by removing any compulsive power from the Synod, leaving to it the task of teaching the truth, and to the congregations the obligation to obey, if what was taught were truly God's Word.

In practice, of course, the early New England Synod had great authority. But this authority relied for its effectiveness on the coercive power of the "regulated" magistrate (i.e., one who followed the "Rule" of Scripture) in matters of the first table of the Law. And it is in their doctrine of the magistrate's power in matters of religion that the New England way (here again, obedient to Reformation principle) clearly demonstrates one great problem of the Reformation. When the authority is that of the Word, and not at all of the Church, it will be the

individual church, and ultimately the individual Christian, who decides whether or not he will obey; already, the individual magistrate was being told that it was his duty to decide for himself whether a Synod had taught the truth of the Word or not.

In many ways, the magistrate was the New England bishop: he it was who exercised much of the episkope which was essential to the bene-esse of the Church. His authority made it possible for the New England churches to be parish churches, and he, more than the Ministers, assumed responsibility for the spiritual life of the parish: he saw to it that all men attended the preaching of the Word; he made and enforced laws establishing the true religion; he provided for the evangelisation of the heathen; and he saw to the peace, orthodoxy, and even the support of the churches.

Here lies latent the proof, which would become manifest with the break-down of Reformed doctrinal solidarity and the loss of the Christian magistrate, that a thorough-going Protestant Church can have no authority within itself.

APPENDIX A
New England Covenant Practice

The way in which New Englanders went about putting their theory of the church covenant into practice (briefly touched upon in Chapter IV) deserves to be examined in more detail for the light which it sheds on the implications of their belief. Many of the things mentioned here were known to the Presbyterians, and in fact attracted their attention and criticism; others are drawn from sources not available to them at the time.

The Gathering of a Church

In the beginnings of the New England plantation, "gathered" congregations consisted mainly of small groups of people who had accompanied their Minister from Old England. Thus, from the beginning most of the groups had a Minister among them (although he had in most cases "renounced" his English ordination).¹ In fact, "it is our usuall and constant course . . . not to gather any Church, untill they have one amongst themselves, fit for a Minister,"² although a church could be gathered without one.³ They often preceded their constitution as a church by a period of private conferences, to discern the true grace of each person;⁴ they then notified the magistrate and the neighbouring churches of the day when they intended to take the covenant⁵ (the presence and approval of the magistrate were essential⁶).

On the day in question, those who planned to enter the cov-

¹See Church-Government &c., I. p. 42f.

²Welde, Answer, p. 55.

³See Church-Government &c., loc. cit.

⁴See Felt, Ecclesiastical History, p. 276.

⁵See Winthrop, Journal, p. 95; Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 22.

⁶See Felt, op. cit., p. 253.

enant would assemble in one place, together with a representative of the magistrate, and Elders (and Messengers) from the nearby churches. After religious exercises (prayer, preaching, etc.), a competent number of Christians¹ would: (1) declare the work of grace in themselves, and their mutual acceptance; (2) make confession of their faith; (3) read and accept the covenant; and (4) receive the right hand of fellowship from the other churches. The first could be done by simple declaration, or by interrogation carried out by a representative of the Elders and Messengers;² the third by signing, voice vote, show of hands, or silent assent.³ If the neighbouring Elders did not approve, especially of the testimony concerning the work of grace, they could recommend postponement; they had to assent before the magistrate would permit the gathering of the church (at least, this was the normal practice).⁴

As for the covenant itself, one sample (used in the gathering of a church) is given here; others will be found below. A covenant was that

Whereby they Protest and promise (by the help of Christ) to walk together as becomes a Church of God, in all duties of holinesse before the Lord, and in all brotherly love and faithfulness to each other, according unto God, withall producing their Covenant, agreed on before amongst themselves, then read it before the Assembly, and then either subscribe their hands to it, or testifie by word of mouth their agreement thereto.⁵

The church could then proceed to the election and ordination of its officers; this did not need to be done on the same day, but it was

¹That is, all those intending to gather; the minimum number was generally agreed to be seven (and some churches of so few were actually gathered; see Felt, op. cit., p. 393), as that was the smallest number able to carry out church discipline (one offending party, one remonstrating brother, two witnesses, and three to whom to report; see Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 31, margin).

²See Winthrop, loc. cit.

³See Welde, Brief Narration, p. 2f.

⁴At Dorchester the covenanting was stopped "for that most of them (Mr. Mather and one more excepted) had burdened their comfort of salvation upon unsound grounds" (Winthrop, loc. cit.).

⁵Welde, loc. cit.

also usual for neighbouring Elders to be present at it, especially to assist with prayer and preaching. They did not, however, perform the actual ordination, or laying on of hands (that is, not at first).¹

Further Admissions

Once a church had been established in New England, the procedure for further admissions was, despite some variation (in degree of severity), fairly standard.² Those who desired admittance first applied to the Ruling Elder(s) (not to the Pastor or Teacher), to whose office this pertained.³ He then examined the applicants concerning their knowledge of doctrine and the manner and matter of God's work of grace in their souls. He made use of his knowledge of the applicants' manner of life, and/or of letters from those who knew them.⁴ At times, these examinations were also attended by members of the congregation; more often, however, they were conducted in private. If the Elder was satisfied, he notified the congregation of the intended application, and asked that objections might be made to him; these were examined; and, if the Elders were satisfied that no hindrance existed, they proceeded to the next step.

The candidate appeared before the whole congregation, usually after the Sunday afternoon service, sometimes on a weekday. The Ruling Elder would then call for any further objections (which could be a cause of further delay⁵). If none appeared, he would

¹See Winthrop, op. cit., pp. 46, 268. Presbyterians supposed that neighbour Elders did ordain (see Hudson, Vindication, pp. 154, 246); and some New Englanders seemed not to object to this idea (see Mather and Tompson, Modest & Brotherly, pp. 46, 48; Cotton, Defence, II. p. 16), or even to countenance it (see Hooker, Survey, II. p. 59).

²The outline for what follows is taken from Dexter, Congregationalism, p. 449f; cf. Cotton, Way, pp. 53-58.

³See Cotton, Of the Holinesse, p. 42.

⁴See Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 7f; Winthrop, Journal, p. 64.

⁵Sometimes of months; see Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 6: "some are so bashfull, as that they choose rather to goe without the Communion, then undergoe such publique confessions and tryals --but that is held their fault." Cf. Hooker, Survey, III. p. 5.

then ask for testimonies in favour of the candidate; by these means, the fact of a "blameless life" could be ascertained. The candidate was then tried and tested about the "work of grace in his soule"; where it was the custom for the men to speak of this before the congregation (which they did in speeches averaging a quarter of an hour in length), there ~~were~~ certain specific things they were expected to relate. The New Englanders themselves did not report these requirements fully, but usually just hinted at their existence:

first we heare them speake concerning the Gift and Grace of Justifying Faith in their soules, and the manner of Gods dealing with them in working it in their hearts . . . ¹

But a letter from "W.T. to Master B."² published by Rathband, gives a more complete, and quite vivid picture of the length to which some (at least) of the New England churches went in attempting to discern the reality of the Spirit's work:

The chiefe Points that the Church desires to be satisfied in are concerning the cutting off from the old Adam, and a mans ingrafting into Christ, how the Law hath had its worke, how the Gospell its worke, what sight a man hath had of sinne, what conviction of former erroneous wayes, what despaire of Salvation in and from themselves, what throwing downe and humiliation, &c? Also whether Christ be reveiled to them, in the ministry of the Word, or any other way? what esteeme they have of him? what desire to enjoy him? whether they have yet closed with their Redeemer in any sweet Promise, or be still in a waiting, expecting condition, staying the time when the Holy Ghost will stirre up the act of Faith, make up the union, give the assurance, &c.³

It is obvious that this is the direct application of the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace, and especially its accompanying ordo salutis, to the practical problem of the determination of fit matter.⁴ Concerning this practice, Lechford noted that candidates were sometimes admitted, "though they be not come to a full assurance of their good estate in Christ."⁵

¹Church-Government &c., I. p. 23; cf. Hooker, loc. cit.

²William Tompson (Pastor at Braintree) to John Ball?

³Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 7ff; cf. Lechford, op. cit., p. 5.

⁴See above, pp. 136, 139-143, 168.

⁵Lechford, loc. cit.

To this statement about the work of grace in the soul, was added a statement of belief (which could be elicited by questions): "Secondly, we heare them speake what they do believe concerning the Doctrine of Faith," both because that knowledge was held necessary so that they might "examine themselves and discerne the Lords body, as Church Members ought to doe when they come to the Lords Table," and also to prevent errors "creeping in" to the church.¹

Following these exercises, the Elders proposed the covenant to the candidates, in which they promised

To give up our selves to the Lord in all duties of holiness; then to the Church, and the Officers, in all love and submission, according to the wil of God, and this they do not trusting in their own strength, but in the Name, and by the grace of Christ himself.²

To this covenant, "silent consent is sufficient."³

To many, however (both Ministers and members), this procedure, common in the first years, increasingly came to seem too severe.

Objections were especially made about the practice of minute enquiries into the work of grace in the candidate's soul, and the necessity to satisfy every member as to the reality of this work. Noyes, the critic within the gates, pointed out a number of unfortunate results of this practise: it afflicted some who came to be members, uncovered their nakedness, caused pride in others, encouraged hypocrites, fostered comparisons, flattered those who were elegant and plausible of speech, sent some to their graves desolate and without the ordinances, and grieved, deformed, and judged others.⁴ "Our fancies," he said, "are a ledden rule, and if we are severe, and have no certain rule to regulate us, we shall

¹See Church-Government &c., idem; Lechford, loc. cit.; Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 7.

²Welde, Brief Narration, p. 9.

³Welde, Answer, p. 25 (all italics).

⁴See Noyes, Temple measured, pp. 63-65; cf. Lechford to a friend, apud Felt, op. cit., p. 422: "Againe, here is required such confessions and professions, both in private and publique, both by men and women, before they are admitted, that three parts of the people of the country remaine out of the church, so that in short time most of the people will remaine unbaptized, if this course hold."

exclude the weak more often then we shall receive them."¹ Hooker agreed, complaining that a rule for admissions was needed, to "prevent . . . curious inquisitions and nicities . . . also those sottish pangs would presently be calmed, when persons complain they cannot joyn with such and such, and yet cannot shew a just exception."² The rule, he said, should be charity directed by reason, which "ever yeelds and inclines to the better part, unlesse evidence come to the contrary." This rule, he proposed, should be as follows:

He that professing the faith, lives not in the neglect of any known duty, or in the commission of any known evill, and hath such a measure of knowledge as may in reason let in Christ into the soul, and carry the soul to him: These be grounds of probabilities, by which charity poised according to rule may and ought to conceive, there be some beginnings of spirituall good.³

To this Cotton added that as far as evidence of grace was concerned, they received those in whom "wee can discerne the least measure of breathing and panting after Christ, in their sensible feeling of a lost estate."⁴

Another method for calming "sottish pangs" and preventing "curious inquisitions and nicities" was to have the examination of the candidate carried out almost entirely in private, at the hands of the Elders (and, later, as the office of the Ruling Elder declined, of the Minister[s]), with only a minimum statement, or none at all, before the congregation. There was a precedent in the case of women, who were (in some churches) examined by the Elders and one or two others, "who upon their testimony are admitted into the Church, without any more adoe."⁵ Hooker, referring to this

¹Noyes, op. cit., p. 63. ²Hooker, Survey, III. p. 6.

³Ibid., I. p. 24 (all italics; "according" is mis-spelt "accorcorring"). This excluded those who obstinately persisted in what they knew to be wrong, and those who were ignorant that Christ was the foundation of their hope; see idem et seqq.

⁴Cotton, Way, p. 58; cf. Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 5.

⁵Welde, Answer, p. 19; cf. Bartlet, Model, p. 76; Cotton, Holinesse, p. 42, where he seems to be agreeing with this examination in camera; the Elders examined the candidates' knowledge and profession, and presented them to the church; if there were no objections, they were admitted.

practice, added,

and since this was necessary for some, and warrantable for all, it's most without exception to receive all after the same manner, that so the infirmities of the weakest may be releev'd, and the seeming exceptions of others also may be prevented.¹

Forms of the Covenant

In this section are given several representative examples of the New England church covenants, arranged in the order of their publication. This one was first printed in 1637:

Every member at his admission doth openly professe, and solemnly promise, that by Christs helpe assisting, he will not onely in generall give up himselfe as to the Lord, to be guided by him, so to the Church according to God, to be directed by them . . . but also in particulars, that he will performe all duties of Brotherly love and faithfulnessse to all the members of the Body, as of diligent watchfulnessse over all his brethren, thoroughly to prevent sinne; so of faithfull admonition after their falls, to regaine them to the Lord from their sinne . . . ²

Another, much more general, appeared in 1639: it defined a covenant as

A solemne and publick promise before the Lord, whereby a company of Christians . . . doe in confidence of his gracious acceptance in Christ, binde themselves to the Lord, and one to another, to walke together by the assistance of his Spirit, in all such wayes of holy worship in him, and of edification one towards another, as the Gospel of Christ requireth of every Christian Church, and the members thereof.³

In a letter which was published in 1641, John Cotton reported how the Elders proposed the covenant to the candidates, asking them

whether you be willing to enter a holy Covenant with God, and with them and by the grace and helpe of Christ be willing to deny your selfe, and all your former polutions, and corruptions, wherein in any sort you have walked, and so to give up your selfe to the Lord Jesus, making him your onely profit [*sic*], your onely guide and King, and Lawgiver, and to walke before him in all professed subjections unto all his holy Ordinance, according to the rule of the Gospell, and to walke together with his Church

¹Hooker, Survey, III. p. 6.

²Church-Government &c., II. p. 73.

³Ibid., II. p. 3 (all italics).

and the members thereof in brotherly love, and mutuall edification and succor according to God, then doe I also promise unto you in the name of this Church, that by the helpe of Christ, we likewise will walke towards you in all brotherly love and holy watchfulnesse to the mutuall building, up one of another in the fellowship of the Lord Iesus, Amen, Amen.¹

It would seem that this (with some minor changes) is the form of the covenant which Lechford was reporting in 1642:

To forsake the Devill, and all his workes, and the vanities of the sinfull world, and all their former lusts, and corruptions, they have lived and walked in, and to cleave unto, and obey the Lord Jesus Christ, as their onely King and lawgiver, their onely Priest and Prophet, and to walke together with that Church, in the unity of the faith, and brotherly love, and to submit themselves one unto another, in all the ordinances of Christ, to mutuall edification, and comfort, to watch over, and support one another.²

Again by Cotton, we are told that Christians join the church by entering a covenant

To take the Lord (as the head of his Church) for their God, and to give up themselves to him, to be his Church and people; which implyeth their submitting of themselves to him, and one to another in his feare; and their walking in professed subjection to all his holy Ordinances: their cleaving one to another, as fellow-members of the same body, in brotherly love and holy watchfulnesse unto mutuall edification in Christ Jesus.³

More fully, we see how, at the gathering of a church, the one chosen to order the work of the day, after preaching, prayer, and confession,

propoundeth the Covenant of promise, Eph 2.12. denying also any sufficiency in themselves to keepe Covenant with God . . . they professe in the name of Christ their acceptance of the Lord for their God, and the Lord Jesus (the head and Saviour of his Church) to be their King, Priest, and Prophet; and give up themselves in professed subjection unto all his holy Ordinances, according to the Rules of the Gospel; withall they professe their full purpose of heart, to cleave one to another in Brotherly love, and mutuall subjection, according to God; not forsaking their Assembly, (but as the Lord shall call) and ministring one to another (as becometh good Stewards of the manifold graces of God) till they all

¹Cotton, Coppy of a Letter, p. 5f (all italics but Amens).

²Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 2. ³Cotton, Way, p. 2.

grow up to a perfect man in Christ Jesus. . . . they all declare their joynt consent in this Covenant, either by silence, or word of mouth, or writing.¹

Abuses of the early practice whereby members were allowed to comment on the sermon after it had been preached, led to its suppression; but it left a trace in Welde's statement that

wee promise willingly and meekely to submit to Christian Discipline without murmuring. . . . That we will not be forward in the congregation to shew our owne parts and gifts in speaking or scrupling . . . ²

An interesting application of the idea of "further light" to the covenant is seen in Hooker's note that a man joins the congregation by

Ingaging himself to walk with them in the covenant of the Church, according to all the rules of the Gospel, that either are or shall be made known to them.³

Finally, a combined civil and religious contract, made before the congregation was actually gathered, was entered into by the settlers of "Contentment" (later Dedham; about twenty-five miles up the Charles River from Boston) on August 15, 1636:

We promise to profess and practice one faith, according to that most perfect rule, the foundation whereof is everlasting love. We engage by all means to keep off from our company such as shall be contrary-minded, and receive only such into our society as will, in a meek and quiet spirit, promote its temporal and spiritual good.⁴

And Felt comments, "the policy of Dedham was that of all the plantations, and, consequently, of the commonwealth."⁵

Objections

There were two important objections made to the New England practice of the church covenant. This is one of the best examples of the first:

Whereas there are divers sober, righteous, and godly men, eminent for knowledge, and other gracious gifts of the Holy Spirit, no ways scandalous in their lives and conversations, Members of the Churches of England (in all Ages famous for piety and learning) not dissenting from the

¹Ibid., p. 8.

²Welde, Answer, p. 16.

³Hooker, Survey, III. p. 5.

⁴Apud Felt, op. cit., p. 260.

⁵Idem.

late and best Reformation of Eng, Scot, &c. Yet they and their posterity are detained from the Seals of the Covenant of Free-grace, because (as it is supposed) they will not take these Churches Covenants, for which as yet they see no light in Gods word, neither can they cleerly perceive what they are, every Church having their Covenant differing from anothers, at least in words, yea some Churches sometime adding, sometimes detracting, calling it sometime the Covenant of Grace, sometime a Branch of it, sometime a Profession of the Free-Covenant, &c.¹

Or, as Rutherford put it, rather more succinctly, you deny them the Seales, as if they were dogges and unworthy prophaners of the Seales onely, because they cannot sweare to your Church-government, which you cannot prove from the word of God.²

To which charges the New Englanders reacted with innocent amazement:

we pray you . . . speake not against common sense, How can wee posibly admit him into our Church Covenant, that denies the Church-Covenant? can wee make him doe that he denies to doe?³

The other objection was that when members joined a particular congregation, they were required to swear, in its covenant, "never to remove thence, except the Congregation consent."⁴ Welde answered, "I never heard (or heard of) such a clause put into Covenant."⁵ Nevertheless, it was in practice the right of a church to grant or withhold what we would now call a 'letter of dismission' on the basis of the soundness of the member's motives for the removal;⁶ and a clause very similar to this was included in at least one covenant.⁷

¹John Child, New-Englands Jonas (1647), p. 11f.

²Rutherford, Due Right, II. p. 202 (he included the covenant as a principal part of government; cf. p. 201); see also Ball, Tryall, pp. 50ff.

³Welde, Answer, p. 23.

⁴Rutherford, loc. cit. (all italics).

⁵Welde, op. cit., p. 47; cf. Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 183.

⁶See idem et seqq.

⁷See Cotton, Way, p. 8; quoted above, p. 297.

The Antinomian Controversy

On November 2, 1634, Anne Hutchinson (then about 44 years of age) united with the church at Boston; as Felt comments, "the sentiments she brought with her were to be the occasion of trouble which she little expected."¹ By 1637 her views, vented mainly through weekly meetings with large numbers of the colony's women-folk, and also through the preaching of her brother-in-law John Wheelwright (who, soon after his arrival in 1636, became Minister at Mt Wollaston), had split the colony wide open.² By November of 1637, both of them had been banished. There is no need here to relate the well-known story of the Antinomian Crisis in New England.³ But it should be noted that the reputation of the New England way received a damaging blow when the news of this heterodox inflammation reached Old England; and that, among other things, it was responsible for the Royal Order of July 23, 1637, for the constitution of a general government in New England. These factors served only to increase the intensity with which the General Court fell upon these enemies to peace, orthodoxy, and colonial safety.⁴

The reason for including this episode of Massachusetts history, however, is not so much to illustrate colonial political problems, as it is to illuminate the effects of New England covenant practice. For I feel that the intensity of this outbreak of what was called "Antinomianism" can only be properly explained in reference to that practice. Like all Puritans, the New Eng-

¹Felt, op. cit., p. 201.

²See Winthrop, Journal, p. 121: "And it began to be as common here to distinguish between men, by being under a covenant of grace or a covenant of works, as in other countries between protestants and papists."

³See Thomas Welde, A Short Story (1644); also, C. F. Adams, Three Episodes of Massachusetts History (Boston, 1892), and Antinomianism in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1636-1638 (Boston, 1894)

⁴See Miller, Orthodoxy, p. 158f; they repeatedly emphasised, in their reports to England, that it was for their manners that the Antinomians were censured, and for their danger to the state that they were banished; not for their opinions per se. See Welde, op. cit., pp. 28, 39.

landers strove mightily to be sure of their regeneration; and, like all Puritans, they found absolute assurance exceedingly difficult to come by:

It is often difficult to see how Puritan divines could believe that they offered battered humanity any more of a haven than the priests, for in practice he who was justified by faith was taken from the¹ rack of fear only to be strapped to the wheel of doubt.

Justification was evidenced by an ability to do the works of the Law; but the works could be done (and even done better) by "close hearted hypocrites," and the faith was a gift (often secretly given) from God only to the elect.

Surely if ever a theology tortured its votaries it was that taught by New England divines, and if ever mortal was driven to distraction it was the mother who, as Winthrop² tells, drowned her child that it might escape damnation.

But the distinctive thing about New England Congregationalism was that it based its polity on this piety. Let one seek to approach the gates of God's house, and he was faced with a phalanx of Elders, waiting to probe his inmost heart to see if he were truly of the Mystical Church. Many were already so fearful as to their estate that they dared not approach; others came forward in confidence, only to be refused, as being in a covenant of works; while those who were admitted could never be sure they had not deceived both the Elders and themselves. The problem of Puritan piety was assurance; but in New England this problem became a way of life. Other Puritans preached about it, wrestled with it, wrote about it in their diaries; New England Puritans did all these, and one thing more: they nailed it to their church doors.

Into the midst of this anxiety, this private heart-searching become public policy, came Mistress Hutchinson. Possessed of a quick wit, a radiant personality, and a talent for helping people, she rapidly became a force to be reckoned with. She ministered to women in their infirmities, and especially in the pangs of childbirth; she won their confidence and trust, and was soon dealing with spiritual infirmities, and midwifing tortured souls through the pangs of hyper-Augustinian piety to the joy of perfect assur-

¹Miller, New England Mind, p. 53.

²Ibid., p. 56.

ance. The habits they had learned from the churches, she told them (from the preaching and especially from the heart-searching admissions policy), were all wrong. They must not look to their sanctification to provide evidence of their justification and assurance of their election; the only evidence of justification was the direct, immediate, inward Assurance of personal union with the Holy Ghost, coming before deeds of the Law, before union with Christ, outside the words of Scripture. This utterly passive rapture of the soul, destroying self and its striving toward godliness, so that the Spirit became the motive force of one's actions; this mystical Assurance, was independent of the ordinances of the church and the preaching of almost all the Ministers (except John Cotton¹ and her husband's sister's spouse John Wheelwright), who were teaching the people salvation by a covenant of works, which was all they knew themselves. But she told hungry, anxious souls of a Covenant of Free Grace which came like a bolt from the blue, setting ablaze the dry tinder of parched souls. She told Christians who were "full of doubts and feares about their conditions (as many tender and godly hearts there were)," not to seek a "legall way of evidencing their good estate by Sanctification, and gazing after qualifications in themselves," but rather to "lay better and safer foundations in Free Grace."²

For her, Free Grace meant, not a forensic principle, but an actual inward event, a spiritual experience in the believer, in which he is, as it were 'taken over' by the Holy Ghost. Winthrop went to the heart of the matter when he said that she

brought over with her two dangerous errors; that the person of the Holy Ghost dwells in a justified one; that no sanctification can help to evidence to us our justification. From these two grew many branches, as our union with the Holy Ghost, so as a Christian remains dead to every spiritual action, and hath no gifts nor graces other than such as are [in] hypocrites, nor any other

¹She had followed Cotton from England because he alone preached Free Grace; to see why his preaching attracted her, see his New Covenant, pp. 104ff; Way Cleared, I. pp. 32-64; Severall Qvestions of Seriovs and necessary Consequence (1647), passim.

²Welde, Short Story, preface.

sanctification but the Holy Ghost himself.¹

No one could tell who was in this union, except those who were in it themselves (which excluded all of the Elders but the two mentioned); a great comfort to those, like the brethren at Dorchester, who had been denied permission to gather as a church because the Elders judged that most of them "had burdened their comfort of salvation upon unsound grounds."² Mrs Hutchinson and her followers protested that the only basis of church membership was Assurance of Free Grace; the "Church in admitting members, is not to looke to holinesse of life, or testimony of the same."³

It is quite likely that, given time, doubts about "union" and "assurance" would have become as prevalent as those about sanctification; but time was not given. The Synod at Newton (later Cambridge), August-September 1637, thoroughly condemned their errors, and Cotton severed himself from their position.⁴ Wheelwright and Anne Hutchinson were banished; others of their party were disfranchised, banished, fined, and/or disarmed (not because their doctrine was erroneous, but because it tended to sedition). Prompt action had dispersed a very real civil and religious threat, and proved the strength of the New England oligarchy.

A view of some of the eighty-two errors condemned by the Synod gives a clear picture of the system and its relationship to New England covenant practice:

1. In the conversion of a sinner, which is saving and gracious, the faculties of the soule, and workings thereof, in things pertaining to God, are destroyed and made to cease.

2. Instead of them, the Holy Ghost doth come and take place, and doth all the works of those natures.

4. That those that bee in Christ are not under the law, and commands of the word, as the rule of life.

12. Now, in the covenant of workes, a legalist may attaine the same righteousnesse for truth, which Adam had in innocency before the fall.

14. That Christ workes in the regenerate as in those that

¹Winthrop, Journal.

²Ibid., p. 95.

³Welde, Short Story, p. 14.

⁴See ibid., p. 21; he described his rejection of Antinomianism in his New Covenant, pp. 134ff.

are dead, and not as in those that are alive, or the regenerate after conversion are altogether dead to spirit-uall acts.

21. To be justified by faith is to be justified by workes.

24. He that hath the seale of the Spirit may certainly judge of any person, whether he be elected or no.

31. Such as see any grace of God in themselves, before they have the assurance of God's love sealed to them, are not to be received members of churches.

32. After the revelation of the Spirit, neither devill nor sinne can make the soule to doubt.

37. We are compleatly united to Christ, before or without any faith wrought in us by the Spirit.

47. The seale of the Spirit is limited onely to the immediate witnesse of the Spirit, and doth never witnesse to any worke of grace, or to any conclusion by a syllogisme.

56. A man is not effectually converted till he hath full assurance.

70. Frequency or length of holy duties, or trouble of conscience for neglect thereof, are all signes of one under a covenant of workes.

72. It is a fundamentall and soule-damning errorr to make sanctification an evidence of justification.

74. All verballcovenants, or covenants expressed in words, as church couenants, vowes, etc., are covenants of workes, and such as strike men off from Christ.

77; Sanctification is so farre from evidencing a good estate, that it darkens it rather; and a man may more clearly see Christ when he seeth no sanctification then when he doth: the darker my sanctification is, the brighter is my justification.¹

The practice of church covenant, the examination of those who presented themselves for church membership to determine whether or not they were (or appeared to be) true saints, was a shibboleth which forced men to strive for blameless lives (in word, deed and thought), so that they might prove, to the church and to themselves, that they truly were of the elect. For many, the demands of holiness proved too difficult; and even those who could live as well as was demanded could never be certain of their salvation. Until it is seen against this background, the intensity of the outbreak of "Antinomianism" in New England is hard to understand. But seen thus, it becomes clear why Mistress Hutchinson won so many avid

¹Apud Felt, Ecclesiastical History, pp. 313-317; cf. Welde, op. cit.

followers in such a very brief time. Assurance of salvation, she said, was to be found in Assurance itself; this came by personal union with the Holy Ghost; thenceforth, the Christian's anxious endeavours ceased, and all was done by the indwelling Spirit. If the Ministers had excluded one from a congregation because he could not conform to their pattern of salvation, he was not to worry, for they could not distinguish the elect from the reprobate; after Assurance, nothing could shake the Christian's confidence; and for those not in the church covenants, there was the reassurance that these were not only unnecessary, but damnable.

The fire was quickly put out. But it had fed on wood made doubly dry by the congregational system itself. Their theory and practice of church covenant and admission was bound to intensify the tendency of Calvinist peity toward legalism and insecurity, by making it not merely a theory of doctrine, but the basic practical reality of church life. We can sympathise with those who opted out of the system to follow Anne Hutchinson, crying:

To evidence justification by sanctification, or graces,
savours of Rome. . . . he that hath elected me must save
me . . . If Christ will, let me sin, let him look to it,
upon his honour bee it.¹

¹Ibid., p. 18.

APPENDIX B

Was the New England Way "Democraticall"?

"Lycurgus, when one desired him to set up a popular government in the City, bid him first set it up in his owne house."¹ Thus did most educated seventeenth century Englishmen, and Continentals as well, regard democracy. A democratic civil polity was not out of the question;² it was simply foolish.³ But when it came to exxlesiastical polity, it was definitely forbidden, even heretical; it was called Morellianism (after Jean Moreau, whose propositions for democratic church government and congregational independence of Synods were combated in the French General Assembly by Beza and Sadeel, and later, in Holland during the Arminian controversy, by Hugo Grotius⁴), and the name alone was usually considered a sufficient epithet; though for emphasis such phrases as, "that very ravery of Morellius,"⁵ could be used.

But was the New England way Morellian? were the colonial divines advocating and practising the frightful extreme of democracy in church government, or "Ecclesiastike Anarchy"? The British writers could not agree. Some looked at the right of the people to elect, ordain, and censure their officers, and to determine admissions and acts of discipline by voice and vote, and they said that it was "Morellian and popular Government";⁶ other, shrewder observers realised the truth, that theory and practice were constantly changing in New England, moving steadily away from

¹Francis Taylor, Gods Covenant the Churches Plea; or A Sermon Preached before . . . Commons (1645), p. 28.

²Any sort of government, or theory of the source of authority, was possible in the state; see Jus Divinum, p. 86.

³See Miller, New England Mind, p. 423.

⁴See Baylie, Dissvasive, p. 196f.

⁵Ibid., p. 13.

⁶Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 26.

the democracy of the Separatists toward a position which was but a step removed from Reformed practice.¹

In New England, a good bit of rugged English democratic assertiveness appeared quite early, both in church and state.² During the period of our study, it was fairly well trodden under foot, although more effectively in the church than in the state.³ It is true that the people had the right to vote, in elections and in censures; but neighbouring Elders, through the magistrate's authority if necessary, had the power to stop an election in case they considered the candidate unfit. And in any case, consultation with, and accepting the advice (if concurrent with the Word) of other Elders was mandatory in New England polity in cases of election, vacancy, and the censure or deposition of a Minister.⁴ But one of the main reasons for allowing people to vote for their Ministers was just because

this is a strong engagement to the people, to yeeld due reverence, subjection and obedience to their Ministers, because they are the men whom themselves have chosen . . . ⁵

It was certainly not intended to inflate them with democratic aspirations.

The polemic literature from New England echoes with phrases which should disabuse us (as they should have disabused the British divines) of any suspicions that the colonials were intent on making

¹See Baylie, op. cit., p. 190f. "One of the more curious features of New England Independency was that its view of democracy approximated that of the Scottish Presbyterians. John Cotton would have been at home in a church north of the border" (Carter, "Presbyterian-Independent Controversy," p. 177). Cf. Wertenbaker, Oligarchy, p. 62: "As the Congregationalists followed the Brownists in Church localism, so they imitated the Presbyterians in discarding democracy for the rule of Church officers."

²See, e.g., Winthrop, Journal, p. 292, where he refers to an incident which "shews plainly the democratical spirit which actuates our deputies"; cf. pp. 179, 294; see Miller, loc. cit.; cf. the questioning of sermons (ca. 1636), Johnson, Wonder-working, p. 90.

³See Mark deWolfe Howe and Louis F. Eaton, "The Supreme Judicial Power in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay," The New England Quarterly, XX, No. 3 (September, 1947), 291-316.

⁴See Welde, Answer, chap. vi.

⁵Mather and Tompson, Modest & Brotherly, p. 57f.

Jean Moreau their prophet:

the authoritative power of transacting all things in the Church, is in the hands of the Officers . . . the power of liberty of the community whereby they may and ought to concur with their guides, so long as they rule in the Lord, is to be carried in a way of obedience unto them . . .

[we] bring as few matters as possible, into the Assembly, rather labouring to take all things up in private . . .

did the word ever give people liberty equall with the Minister? doth it not professedly condemne such doings in the Church?

These things . . . we have . . . set downe . . . to wash off the blot of popular Government from the wayes of Christ, as if all authority were taken from the Ministers, or nothing left them but to dispense the seales, and in all other things to sit meerely as a moderator in the Churches of Christ, which we utterly disclaime.¹

As a last resort, the brethren could of course censure, depose, and/or excommunicate their officers. But they could not do this without taking the "counsel" of neighbour churches, which meant, in effect, that they had to invite neighbouring Ministers to approve of the denunciation of a fellow-clergyman. When one recalls that these Puritan laymen had an enormous respect for a university education, and also that the magisterial power was likely to side with the Elders against anything which could be called 'disorderly,' one gets the distinct impression that Rutherford, Baylie and Gillespie would not have felt the least insecure in a New England pulpit.²

It must be concluded, then, that most Presbyterian writers could not have been utterly insensitive to what the New England controversialists were hinting about the actual operation of their system; and that their occasional accusations of Morellianism were more a matter of form, and an objection against the latent democratic tendencies of New England theory, than they were a sincerely felt outcry against the anarchy of some New England nundinae

¹Allin and Shepard, Defence, p. 169f; Welde, Answer, p. 41; ibid., p. 40; Allin and Shepard, op. cit., p. 171.

²"Had Rutherford or any of the others gone to New England, they might have become Independents"; William M. Campbell, "Samuel Rutherford" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Faculty of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, 1937), p. 77.

populares. To quote Henry Martyn Dexter: "It is clear that, with all objection made against it, the New England, was not then violently suspected of being a democratic way."¹ Nor does that indefatigable student of Congregationalism himself credit the early New England way with any trace of democracy:

There was no dishonesty, and nothing said for effect, when John Cotton and others wrote to England their distrust and dislike of democracy; for they were not as yet democrats either in Church or State, and they meant every word that they said.²

c/ Dexter's proclivity toward grinding the polity axe to a democratic edge ~~d~~compels us to respect his conclusions when he finds, after turning every stone of the early history of his own New England churches, only the autocracy of early Barrowism. Had there been any trace of practical democracy anywhere except in the churches of the Plymouth colony, we may rest assured that he would have found it. For him, pure Brownism is the apostolic pattern.³ In Browne's system, he says, Christ ruled as an absolute monarch, through every member of his kingdom; in effect, a monarchy in Christ and a democracy in the people.⁴ But to this formula Barrow added the aristocracy of the eldership (borrowed, so Dexter believes, from the Presbyterian system), and in so doing corrupted the simplicity and purity of the primitive pattern.⁵ His comment on the Barrowist approach to discipline both reveals Dexter's bias and shows that system's affinity with early New England

¹Dexter, Congregationalism, p. 463. ²Ibid., p. xi.

³See ibid., p. 110f; cf. pp. 494, 514, 521 n. 2, 522f.

⁴See ibid., pp. 163, 222, 238f. The epigram, "the Government of the Church, in regard of the Body of the people is Democratically: in regard of the Elders Aristocratically; in regard of Christ, truly Monarchically" (Hooker, Survey, I. p. 206), was very popular in New England; it can be traced back at least to (?Barrow's) Hay any worke for Cooper (1589), p. 26, which compared this style of church polity to the English state, with King, Lords (or Council) and Commons. It is significant that the simile omits the body of the people (see above, p. 128). Norton, however, protested: "Ecclesiae Christianae neque constituta est Monarchia, neque Aristocratia, neque Democratia, sed Theocratia; addatur si placet Christocratia" (Responsio, p. 67, referring to Ames, Bel-larminus Enervatus, I.iii.1).

practice:

what is really meant is that the Elders shall cut off the incorrigible offender, in the presence of the brotherhood. That is, the Elders are the church. So that the fond notion of the oligarchic imperium within the democratic imperio, would seem essentially to flavor this document, and so to characterize the very beginnings of the creed-literature of modern Congregationalism.¹

He claims that this insertion into the Brownist system is not only wrong, but so out of place as to be unworkable; a sort of unhealthy parasite on the host system.² And when he turns to the New Englanders, and reads their description of the management of church censures,³ he pierces to the heart of the matter:

It is impossible to mistake this. Stripped of its verdant festoonings of fine and pleasant language, it is the intense Barrowism of Francis Johnson, with the single redeeming trait that it welcomes the fraternal advice of sister churches. . . . they quietly assumed that Christ would reveal His will to the Elders, but would not reveal it to the church-members. . . . To all intents and purposes, then, this was precisely the aristocracy which they affirmed that it was not. . . . the Elders could have their way in the end by merely adding the insult of the apparent but illusive offer of coöperation, to the injury of their absolute control.⁴

As Samuel Stone put it, this was "a speaking Aristocracy in the Face of a silent Democracy."⁵

In this system, of course, the office of Ruling Elder is unnecessary; it was never conceived that he should be a 'representative' of the people. Only Christ ruled, and that through his Word, not through the people's opinions, or their inspired utterances; the Pastors and Teachers were the only ones equipped by ~~by~~ education with the tools needed to expound and apply the Word to particular situations. Thus, throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century, Ruling Elders were becoming more and

¹Ibid., p. 261, referring to Barrow's A True Description out of the Word of God of the visible Church (1589).

²See Dexter, op. cit., p. 261f.

³See above, pp. 228-234; Church-Government &c., pp. 60-62; cf. Cotton, Way, p. 95.

⁴Dexter, op. cit., p. 428f; cf. pp. 424, 451.

⁵Apud Cotton Mather, Magnalia, III, 118.

more scarce.¹ Nor was it long before considerations of money and manpower proved fatal to the system of having a Pastor and Teacher in each church. The outcome was an autocracy in which the single Minister, with all the power belonging to the congregational Presbytery now solely in his hands, and using what amounted to a veto when the brethren seemed otherwise-minded than himself, governed as he saw fit.² The irony of it was that this was very nearly the system James Noyes had been advocating all along: "Pastors and Teachers are not distinct Officers. . . . Governing Elders are not distinct officers in the Churches. . . . The Presbyterie is to govern with great condescendencie, and to labour for the consent of the Church in cases of moment."³ And, stating it baldly:

The commom [*sic*] members are not to govern by suffrage and co-ordinate authority together with their Elders. Prudence and brotherly love require an endeavour in the Elders for the *procuring* of consent from all; but consent is not absolutely necessary. The consent of the people is not authoritative, but consultative in respect of the Elders.⁴

And it is instructive to observe how the Cambridge Platform, as early as 1648, in restating the old epigrammatic triptych, altered one part by a careful but decisive stroke: the government of the Church, it said,

in respect of Christ, the head and King of the church. . . it is a monarchy; in respect of the body or brotherhood of the church, and power from Christ granted unto them, it *resembles* a democracy; in respect of the presbytery, and power committed unto them, it is an aristocracy.⁵

The New England practice of lay-ordination horrified British divines; partly because they felt that it could lead to disorder

¹See Dexter, *op. cit.*, p. 482.

²See *ibid.*, p. 484f, for a more detailed description.

³Noyes, *Temple*, pp. 17, 21, 29; cf. Dexter, *op. cit.*, p. 432f, for a comment on this last quotation.

⁴Noyes, *op. cit.*, p. 30; cf. [Henry Jacob], *A Confession and Protestation of the Faith* &c. (1616), *apud* Gillespie, *Assertion*, p. 119.

⁵See *Cambridge Platform*, x.3 (*italics mine*).

and the choice of unworthy men (in the New England system as we have seen it, this was hardly likely), and partly because they believed that the lesser could not give power to the greater, the governed to their governor. Samuel Hudson, however, took the opposite tack, twitting the colonists for betraying their principles by denying ordination to laymen, and by calling instead for it to be performed by the Elders of other congregations.¹ But was he correct?

This is very difficult to answer, since for many years, New England practice was changing and evolving, often without being noticed. According to the accounts of early ordinations, care would seem to have been taken to keep the ceremony strictly within the congregation. When Mr. Carter was ordained at Woburn on September 22, 1642, some members asked to have neighbouring Elders perform the ceremony;

but others supposing it might be an occasion of introducing a dependency of churches &c. and so a presbytery, would not allow it, so it was performed by one of their own members, but not so well and orderly as it ought.²

Imposition of hands was regularly used at Boston, but whether "only as a sign of election and confirmation,"³ or as a proper ordination, was not always clear. In becoming Pastor of the congregation of which he had been Teacher, Mr. Wilson was again ordained, at the hands of the Teacher, who also ordained Mr. Oliver a Ruling Elder. Following this hands would seem to have been laid on once again all around, for good measure: "and then two deacons (in the name of the congregation) upon the elder, and then by the elder and the deacons upon the pastor."⁴ Another example of multiple imposition is seen in the narrative of John Cotton's ordination as Teacher of the Boston church on October 10, 1633:

Then the pastor and the two elders laid their hands upon

¹See Hudson, Vindication, pp. 21, 154, 246.

²Winthrop, Journal, p. 268.

³Ibid., p. 20; Wilson seems to have been reluctant to appear to be renouncing his English ordination.

⁴Ibid., p. 46.

his head and the pastor prayed, and then taking off their hands laid them on again, and speaking to him by his name they did thereby design him to the said office in the name of the Holy Ghost, and did give him the charge of the congregation, and did thereby (as by a sign from God) endue him with the gifts fit for his office, and lastly did bless him.¹

It is obvious that in these early ordinations, imposition of hands could only be performed by members of the congregation involved, even when this meant the risk of disorderly proceedings.

One is startled, therefore, to find Mather and Thompson, as early as 1644, stating quite clearly that imposition of hands was to be performed by laymen only when they had no officers of their own, "and in such places, where Elders can not conveniently be borrowed from any other Church."² In spite of what Congregational theory would seem to imply, an important body of opinion grew up in New England which gave neighbouring Elders the right to participate in ordinations, if invited:

sith ordinary Elders are not like Apostles, to feed all flocks, but that flock of God, which dependeth upon them, . . . Therefore wee doe not understand, how they can assume authority and power unto themselves, to ordain Elders to other Churches, whereof themselves are neither Elders nor members, unlesse they had a calling thereto, by the request of that Church where the Elders are to be ordained.³

And by a subtle twist of their own theory, Hooker proved the right of neighbouring Elders to take part in an ordination. They had no power in another congregation than their own; but ordination was not an act of power, since the officer to be ordained was already an officer, by reason of his election (which was an act of power). Therefore,

the Elders also of other Congregations may be invited hereunto, and interested in the exercise of it in another Church, where they have no power, and upon a person, who hath more power in the place than themselves . . .⁴

This was regarded as an act of approbation, more than of ordination

¹Ibid., p. 55f.

²See Mather and Thompson, Modest & Brotherly, p. 46; cf. Cotton, Defence, II. p. 16.

³Mather and Thompson, op. cit., p. 48.

⁴Hooker, Survey, II. p. 59.

in the 'Classical' sense. The Cambridge Platform allowed imposition of hands to be performed by neighbouring Elders in churches which had no Elders of their own, and wished to invite others to do this act.¹ The way the wind was blowing is more clearly seen in the fact that by the time of the Reforming Synod of 1679, thirty-odd years later, a "Plebian Ordination" would have been a matter of "Discourse and Wonder."²

In spite of (or perhaps spurred on by) the democratic tendencies inherent in their polity, the New England clergy were slowly but surely aggrandising nearly all the ecclesiastical power to themselves. Elections were closely supervised; censures were carefully controlled; authority formerly shared by an Elder and two Ministers was in the hands of one Parson. The New England way gradually ceased even to "resemble" a democracy, except in some carefully qualified phrases of its polity statements. It was an aristocracy of the clergy, an autocracy of the college- and university-educated, an oligarchy of congregational episkopoi. Some were governors, and some were governed. The system was to enter a period of great change in the eighteenth century; but that time was not yet. It was a period which might be summed up in two sentences:

"Are you, sir, the person who serves here?" said a traveller, to the pastor at Rowley, whom he met in the street. "I am, sir, the person who rules here," was the prompt reply.³

¹See Cambridge Platform, ix.5.

²Mather, Magnalia, V, 42.

³Ezra Hoyt Byington, The Puritan in England and New England (London, 1896), p. 128.

APPENDIX C
Congregational Officers

There was substantial agreement between Presbyterian and Congregational divines concerning the officers which were to be set in particular congregations. Some mention, however, needs to be made of a few details, for the sake of completeness. The principal texts from which these Puritans deduced their system of congregational officers have already been discussed.¹

John Davenport and William Hooke, having mentioned the extraordinary officers of the New Testament (Apostle, prophet, evangelist), went on to list the ordinary ones:

1. The Pastor, to whom is given a gift of wisdom, for exhortation. 2. The Teacher, to whom is given a gift of knowledge for doctrine. 3. The Ruling Elder, who is to Rule with diligence. 4. The Deacon, who is to administer the Churches treasure with simplicity: under whom is included, the widow or Deaconess, who is to attend the sick and impotent with compassion and chearfulness.²

Joseph Felt notes that "considerable distinction was then made between the two offices of pastor and teacher, now and long since merged in one person";³ this distinction was based on Scripture (Eph. 4:11, Rom. 12:7f), and the New Englanders were aided in maintaining it in practice by the large number of Ministers who came over in the Great Migration.

The Pastor's duties were not what we should now call 'pastoral care'; both he and the Teacher were subsumed under the one category of "teachers" (I Cor. 12:28); and each was to exercise his gifts in the public, not the private, ministry of the Word. This is underlined by an illuminating passage in Hooker:

¹See above, pp. 25-32.

²Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme, p. 35f. For a similar list of Robert Browne's, see Dexter, Congregationalism, p. 107.

³Felt, Ecclesiastical History, p. 163.

For how inequall and unreasonable would it seem to a man acquainted with the weight and work of the ministry, that when the Pastor or Teacher should be attending upon reading, and searching the sense and mind of God in the word, and the mysteries of God therein, (who is sufficient for such things?) that they should be then taken off their studies, & be forced to attend upon mens speciall weaknesses or wants in private, when they should prepare for the publick dispensations, so that the one must be of necessity neglected, or they distracted in both?¹

It is Hooker who gave the best definition of the responsibilities of the two offices. Of the Pastor he said:

The scope of his Office is to work upon the will and the affections, and by savoury, powerfull, and affectionate application of the truth delivered, to chafe it into the heart, to wooe and win the soul to the love and liking, the approbation and practise of the doctrine which is according to godlinesse. . . . his main work . . . is this: He attends and insists upon exhortation how he may speak a good word for Christ . . . and betroth the soul to our Saviour. . . . how to come within the bosome of a sinner, and grapple so powerfully with his spirit, that he may take no nay at his hand.²

He was to strive to convert the sinner, shatter his hypocrisy, comfort him when disheartened, and spur him on when slothful in spirit.³ Cotton added that he was to instruct in matters of practice, and to strive for reformation of manners, both private and public.⁴

As to the office of Teacher, while Hooker agreed that a divine might be a teacher in a school, he said that the office mentioned in the texts was really given to the church. He maintained that since he was a Minister of the Covenant of Grace, he could also "administer the seales of the Covenant."

The aime and scope of the Doctor is, to informe the judgement, and to help forward the work of illumination, in the minde and understanding, and thereby to make way for the truth, that it may be settled and fastned upon the heart . . . ⁵

This involved interpreting texts to clear up their difficulties; "to deliver the fundamentall points of Christian Faith," by way

¹Hooker, Survey, II. p. 18f.

²Ibid., II. p. 19.

³Idem et seq.

⁴Cotton, Way, p. 13.

⁵Hooker, op. cit., II. p. 21.

of platforms of doctrine; and to handle controversies and refute error.¹

It is not to be thought, however, that this view of the separate functions of Pastor and Teacher was confined to New England. The following passage could have been written there:

they differ, in that the Pastor laboureth in the word of exhortation, that is, by the gift of wisdome applieth the word to the manners of his flocke, and that in season and out of season, as he knoweth their particular cases to require. The Doctor laboureth in the word of Doctrine, that is, without such applications as the Pastor useth, by simple teaching he preserveth the truth and sound interpretation of the Scriptures, against all heresie and error.²

In fact, it was penned by George Gillespie. Nor was he alone in this; the London Ministers agreed that where there was more than one Minister in a congregation, one could be called Pastor, and the other Teacher, according to their gifts; adding, "but where there is only one Minister in one particular Congregation, he is to performe, as farre as he is able, the whole work of the Ministry."³ In general, Rutherford agreed with this position of the Londoners, adding only (in response to Cotton's Way) that it was not inconsistent for a man who had both gifts, to attend to both offices; and he pointed out that this was permitted by the New Englanders.⁴ Cotton could hardly object to this, as his colleague John Wilson, who had previously been Teacher, had since 1632 been Pastor, of the Boston Church.⁵ And it was quite true what Rathband averred, that

in practise they usually confound them [the two offices]:

¹See ibid., II. p. 21f; cf. Cotton, loc. cit.

²Gillespie, Assertion, p. 9.

³Jus Divinum, p. 141 (all italics).

⁴See Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 140f; Hooker allowed that this was possible, "yet ever disadvantageous," since a person who tried to develop two gifts at once could end up good at neither.

Admitting that in some things I Cor. 12:28 speaks of gifts which need not be distinct offices, rather weakens the Presbyterian case for Ruling Elders, based as it was on the idea that "governments" was a distinct office, and not just a gift.

⁵See Winthrop, Journal, p. 46; Felt, Ecclesiastical History, p. 163.

both Pastour and Teacher equally teaching and equally applying both the Word and Seales without any difference. And either of them usually supplying the place of both in divers of their Churches, which are not furnished with both.¹

Once again, James Noyes seemed to be speaking prophetically:

"All Bishops or Presbyters, are both Pastors and Teachers: Pastors and Teachers are not distinct Officers."² He added that these officers were the rulers as well; all of this was based on his belief that the teaching, exhorting, and ruling mentioned in Romans 12:7f were gifts, not offices; and that in I Corinthians 12:28, offices were listed in order, gifts out of order.³

Speaking of Ruling Elders, Cotton said, the "wit of man hath found out many inventions and exceptions against every Scripture that holdeth forth this Ordinance."⁴ It is not germane here to go into this controversy, since Congregational and Presbyterian divines were in agreement on this point,⁵ and the New Englanders used the same arguments for the office as their opposites.⁶ As for the duties of the Ruling Elder, they were likewise agreed that what acts soever of spirituall Rule and Government, Christ hath committed to his Church over and above the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments: All such acts of Rule,⁷ are committed to the Ruling Elders, and none but such.

These duties were largely what we should now call 'pastoral care'; they may be divided into three spheres of activity.⁸ Outside the

¹Rathband, Briefe Narration, p. 42; see Appendix D.

²Noyes, Temple, p. 17. ³See ibid., pp. 17-21.

⁴Cotton, Way, p. 14.

⁵See Rutherford, Due Right, I. p. 141; the controversy itself is echoed in his book; see I. pp. 141-159.

⁶They argued from Rom. 12:7f, I Cor. 12:28, and especially I Tim. 5:17 (it is interesting to note that the Westminster Assembly could not accept this last text as a proof, and had to rest content with the former two; see Campbell, Triumph, p. 126); cf. Hooker, Survey, II. pp. 8-15.

⁷Cotton, Way, p. 36; cf. p. 54; his Of the Holinesse, pp. 42-87; Hooker, Survey, II. p. 18.

⁸This enumeration is compiled from Cotton, Way, p. 36f; Hooker, Survey, II. pp. 15-18; and Welde, Brief Narration, p. 3f; which are, for the most part, in agreement.

assembly, they were "to visit from house to house, to see how all thrive in godlinesse, while the other [Pastor and Teacher] give themselves to the Word and Doctrine"; this meant seeing that no one lived "inordinately or idly," correcting scandal, and resolving differences by admonition and good counsel; they were also to visit and pray for the sick. At the threshold of the church, they were to receive inquiries, "survey the estates, and ripen all such as are to be admitted in the Church," and prepare other matters which were to come before the congregation. And in the assembly, they were to moderate (with the Ministers), present and receive members, participate in ordinations, and carry out the sentence of excommunication (although in some churches this was given to the appropriate teaching officer). Here again, Noyes seems to have seen what lay ahead for New England:

The teaching Elders are most meet to act in publique administrations; in private administrations the Deacons were wont in ancient times to do what ruling Elders are supposed to serve for.¹

New England divines also agreed with the Presbyterians on the subject of Deacons and Widows, as well as agreeing among themselves.² Welde's description may therefore stand for all:

The Deacons office is to have a diligent eye, to look into the necessities of the Church, and with a tender heart, and carefull hand supply them from the Church-Treasury with such things as they need for necessity, conveniency and comfort, and to see that none want, but honourably to supply them, even before they fall into any extremity, or be forced to crave help from the Church; and therefore he is To Collect diligently, Keep faithfully, Distribute carefully the Churches treasure, that so hee may serve the Tables, which is the proper work;

¹Noyes, Temple, p. 22.

²Cf. Rutherford, Due Right, I. pp. 159-174; Jus Divinum, pp. 161-163. There were one or two minor disagreements: Cotton did not feel that the Deacons should go about collecting, but simply receive the offering at worship or at their home. Some of his countrymen did not agree; Hooker was in favour of an assessment of every member according to his capability, and of the duty of the Deacon to go and collect it. See Lauues and Liberties, p. 9: "every such Inhabitant who shal not voluntarily contribute proportionably to his ability . . . to all common charges both civil and ecclesiastical shall be compelled thereto by assessment & distress" (enacted 1638, 1643, 1644).

the Lords Table, Ministers table, and the poors table.

To the Deacons office, we would adde Deaconesses, where such may be had, according to which should be widowes of the Church faithfull, approved, and full of good works, who may give themselves to works of mercy cheerfully; and to be serviceable also to those that are sick, when the Deacon so conveniently cannot, and sometime so modestly may not send their help as that sex may.¹

Concerning all of these congregational officers, the actual state of the New England churches, as Lechford reported it in 1642, was that they had variously: one or two Teaching Elders; one or two Ruling Elders (some none at all); one, two or three Deacons; and no Deaconesses.²

The original, ideal arrangement of officers in early New England Congregationalism did not last very long;³ and the pattern of change was already evident to Cotton when he wrote the Way:

Wee have been the more large in clearing the severall sorts of these Elders, which Christ hath ordained in his Church, because wee find Satan hath been very busie to set the wits of men awork, both to confound the severall Functions of the Pastor and Teacher, and utterly to abandon the office of a Ruling Elder.⁴

¹Welde, Brief Narration, p. 3f.

²See Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 15.

³See above, p. 310f.

⁴Cotton, Way, p. 38.

APPENDIX D
New England Worship

One of the most important reasons for the flight of many Ministers to New England was the opportunity it offered them to escape the "prescript or stinted liturgie" of the English Church. That this finds space only in an Appendix is due to the fact that during the period of this study the New Englanders were arguing with Presbyterians, who had little to object to their form of worship. Nevertheless, the importance of their worship, especially to them, should not be underestimated. One great joy the American shores brought to these men was the opportunity at last to come before God in purified, Biblical worship,

wherein our desire and care above all things is, to have all, and no more than all the Ordinances of Christ himself; and all those (as far as God is pleased to lend light) in the native purity and simplicity, without any dressings or paintings of humane inventions.¹

Our understanding of the New England way is not complete without some familiarity with their worship. "The liturgy in use--and by that phrase I mean any form consciously chosen or unconsciously employed--is the embodiment of the worshipful experience."² By their liturgy a people both form their character and reveal their heart.

Their place of worship was not called a church: that title was reserved for the house of living stones.

The publique worship is in as faire a meeting house as they can provide, wherein, in most places, they have beene at great charges. Every Sabbath or Lords day, they come together at Boston, by wringing of a bell, about nine of the clock or before.³

¹Welde, Brief Narration, p. 7; cf. Cotton, Way, p. 65.

²D. H. Hislop, Our Heritage in Public Worship (Edinburgh, 1935), p. 15.

³Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 16. For a description of the N. E. meeting-house, see Byington, The Puritan, pp. 139-147.

The order for the two Sabbath diets of worship was as follows:

Morning

1. Prayer
2. Scripture reading with Exposition
3. Metrical Psalm
4. Sermon
- (5. Psalm)
- (6. Baptism)
- (7. Lord's Supper and Psalm)
8. Prayer and Blessing

Afternoon

1. Prayer
2. Scripture reading and Exposition
- (3. Psalm)
4. Sermon
- (5. Baptism)
6. Contribution
- (7. Trials and admissions, censures, etc.)
8. Psalm
9. Prayer and Blessing.

Where there was no bell, a drum, or the blowing of a conch shell, or the running up of a flag, would signal the approaching worship. The meeting-houses were not heated, even in the fierce New England winters.

Morning Worship.---(1) After notice given of any desiring remembrance in the prayers of the church, there was the opening prayer, with intercession and thanksgiving, usually given by the Pastor and lasting about a quarter of an hour. He was expected to pray with his hands lifted, and his eyes turned up toward heaven (making it quite impossible, as Cotton pointed out, for him to read prayer from a book).¹ The people were to listen and pray in silence, the Minister being their "mouth to God"; "and in the end of the prayer, to answer with one accord in voyce, Amen."² (2) Then came the Scripture reading, which had immediately to be followed by an exposition, as it was held superstitious to read the Word without "giving the sense." It was later felt that this exposition was not proper to the Pastor's office, and, where there was no Teacher, this part of the service was abandoned; finally, the public reading of Scripture fell entirely out of use in New England, and it did not come back into favour until the early

¹See Cotton, Modest, pp. 36, 40.

²Ibid., p. 32.

eighteenth century.¹ (3) Psalms in "English meetre" were sung, usually from the Bay Psalm-Book (1640), and about ten tunes were generally known.² In some churches, the Ruling Elder "dictated" ('lined-off') the Psalm. The way by which the turning of the Psalms into a set metrical form was excused as not falling under the ban on prescript liturgies of man's devising, is an excellent example of the tendency to regard "scripture-consequence" as of equal authority with Scripture itself. The Psalms were from God; singing them being an ordinance, they must therefore be put into English, and into metre to avoid confusion; all this was warranted, "for he that instituteth the end, instituteth the necessary meanes that leadeth to the end."³

(4) The sermon was preached by either Teacher or Pastor, whoever had not expounded the Word in (2). This was timed by an hour-glass on the pulpit, and usually lasted about an hour. In the early years, sermons were not read:

the reading of a mans owne Sermon in stead of preaching it will much detract from the life and power of it, and make a man of God unserviceable for his place . . . the reading of a Sermon for preaching, is a sinfull manner of preaching; The difference will ever hold between the word read, and preached: They are two distinct Ordinances.⁴

The sermon could be followed by a short prayer, and (5) another Psalm. (6) If there were any children to be baptised, their parents (one of whom, at least, had to be a church member) brought them, and "the Father presenteth his owne child to baptisme."⁵ The Sacrament was administered by either the Pastor or Teacher (although some doubted the latter's right to administer the Seals), standing in the Deacon's seat (below the pulpit and Elder's seat), by sprinkling, washing the face, or pouring, with prayer "conceived by the Minister, according to the present occasion."⁶

(7) "The Lotds [sic] Supper we administer for the time, once

¹See Dexter, Congregationalism, p. 452, n. 147.

²See ibid., p. 452, n. 148; five of these tunes "are those now known as York, Hackney, Windsor, St. Mary's and Martyrs."

³See Cotton, loc. cit.

⁴Ibid., p. 43.

⁵Cotton, Way, p. 68.

⁶Idem.

a moneth at least, and for the gesture, to the people sitting;"¹ all who were not church members departed (visitors who were attested by letter or the knowledge of one of the congregation, applied to the Elders to be admitted to the Supper, and were propounded to the congregation before the Sacrament began²); and the Minister (Pastor or Teacher) took his seat at the table (he remained sitting throughout; this was done in imitation of Christ, but sometimes meant that many of the congregation could not see him). The manner of administration is best seen in outline; the words are Thomas Welde's:

When the time of solemn action is come,
the Pastor sets apart the Elements for so sacred employment,
he blesseth the bread,
he breaketh it in the sight of all the people,
declaring withall, and applying the signification
of those holy Rites and Actions:
He distributes it to those who be neer about him,
and gives the rest to the Deacons hands, who stand ready
(according to their office attending on the Table)
to give unto all the people, not bowing or kneeling . . .
After the bread hee taketh the cup,
and blesseth it distinctly by it self;
for so our Lord Christ did,
he powres out the wine,
and distributes it; this done,
a Psalme is sung,
Prayers returned,
and the congregation dissolved.³

Cotton added that after the Minister had taken, blessed, and broken the bread, he

commanded all the people to take and eate it, as the body of Christ broken for them, he taketh it himselfe, and giveth it to all that sit at Table with him, and from the Table it is reached by the Deacons to the people sitting in the next seates about them, the Minister sitting in his place at the Table.⁴

From this it is obvious that the table was in the midst of the congregation, probably at floor level; that all the officers sat

¹Idem; notification (and exhortation) was given the week previous, as the Supper was not on a set day (Welde, op. cit., p. 8).

²See Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 17.

³Welde, loc. cit. (outline form mine).

⁴Cotton, loc. cit.

at it; and it would seem that the Deacons did not carry the elements about, but simply passed them to those sitting next the table, and the people sent them from hand to hand. Their eagerness to imitate Christ in everything extended to insisting on separate blessings for each element; as Cotton said:

After they have all partaked in the bread, hee taketh the cup in like manner, and giveth thanks a new, (blesseth it) according to the example of Christ . . . ¹

He was quite definite that this had been the first institution, but "for what reason the Lord himselfe best knoweth."² He recognised that the blessing and the eucharistic prayer were one and the same, and not separate acts.

Afternoon Worship.--This usually began at two o'clock (although the interval was shortened in places where many people had to come a great distance, and could not have returned to their homes between services); it was often called "evening worship" but there was no service after dark. (1) The prayer was usually by the Pastor. Responsibility for (2) reading and exposition, and (4) the sermon, was reversed from the morning, Pastor and Teacher taking turn about; but if there was not time, (2) was omitted. (5) Baptism, if there was occasion for it, was administered as in the morning. (6) As Cotton described the contribution,

the Deacons (who sit in a seate under the Elders, yet in sundry Churches lifted up higher then the other pews) doe call upon the people, that as God hath prospered them and hath made their hearts willing, there is now time left for the contribution: presently the people from the highest to the lowest in sundry Churches do arise, the first pew first, the next next, and so the rest in order, and present before the Lord their holy offerings.³

This shows how the people were "dignified" in the church in order of rank. They filed up one side, put money or promissory notes in a box, or laid other contributions before the Deacon's seat, and went back to their seats the other way.⁴ Following that,

¹Idem.

²Ibid., p. 69.

³Idem; in some communities, non-church members were taxed for the support of the Minister(s), and this aroused some resentment; see Dexter, op. cit., p. 455, and n. 161.

⁴See Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 18.

there would be (7) public examination and admission of members, as well as cases of discipline.¹ "And so after a Psalme of praise to God, with thanksgiving, and prayer to God for a blessing upon all the ordinances administred that day, and a blessing pronounced upon the people, the Assembly is dismissed."²

In addition to Sabbath worship, there were occasional days of thanksgiving (of which the American national holiday of that name, still set aside annually by Presidential proclamation, is a survival) or of fasting, proclaimed by the Magistrate in response to current blessings or troubles. Also, they continued the Puritan practice of "lectures," on weekday afternoons, where expository sermons were preached; in the Bay area, these were on different days of the week, and those so minded could "heare the Word almost every day of the weeke in one Church or other, not farre distant from them."³ And it is a measure of the devotion of that Puritan folk, that the magistrates tried to curtail the lectures, feeling that the week's work was suffering; and that the popular clamour was so great as to force them to rescind the order.⁴

Marriages were performed by the magistrate. At funerals, there was neither sermon nor prayer.

¹For a description of disciplinary procedure, see above, pp. 228ff. In some churches, this item could be so long as to be burdensome.

²Cotton, op. cit., p. 70.

³Idem.

⁴See Dexter, op. cit., p. 457, n. 163.

For the details in this Appendix, see Cotton, Way, pp. 65-70; Welde, Brief Narration, p. 7f; Lechford, Plain Dealing, chap. ii; Dexter, Congregationalism, pp. 452-459; Byington, The Puritan, pp. 139-157.

APPENDIX E

Chronological List of the Chief Works in the Controversy about the New England Way

Full references to all these works will be found in the Bibliography. Parentheses are used for books which may be of some interest or importance, but which are not directly germane to the controversy. Titles which bear the same superior figure are different editions of the same work. An asterisk is used to denote books which Nathanael Homes felt were "Models" of his "Church way" (see Cotton, Way Cleared, sig. A2 verso).

Massachusetts Bay Company, The Hymble Request (1630)
Morton, New English Canaan (1637)

- 1640 (Christ on his Throne)
Ball, Friendly Triall

- 1641 Cotton, Abstract or the Lawes of New England
Coppie of a Letter
Hooke, New-Englands Sence
New Englands Teares
(Hooker, Danger of Desertion)

- 1642 (Cotton, Briefe Exposition of . . . Canticles)¹
Doctrine of the Church ["Cotton's Catechism"]²
Modest and Cleare Answer
(Powring ovt of the Seven Vials)
True Constitution²
Lechford, Plain Dealing

- 1643 Ashe and Rathband, A Letter of many Ministers³
*Church-Government and Church-Covenant discussed²
Cotton, Doctrine of the Church [better edition]²
*Goodwin, T., et al., Apologeticall Narration
Herle, Independency

- 1644 Apollonius, Consideratio⁴
Ball, Tryall of the New-Chvrch Way³
*Cotton, Keyes
Mather and Tompson, Modest & Brotherly Ansvver
M.S. to A.S.
Parker, True Copy of a Letter
Rathband, Briefe Narration
Rutherford, Due Right of Presbyteries
Welde, Answer to W.R. His Narration

- Welde, Short Story
Williams, Bloudy Tenet
- 1645 Apollonius, Consideration⁴
Baylie, Dissvasive
Cawdrey, Vindiciae Clavium
(Cotton, Covenant)
* Way of the Churches
Hollingworth, Examination
Hudson, Essence and Unitie
Shepard, Defence of the Answer⁵
Welde, Brief Narration
Wheelwright, Mercurius Americanus
- 1646 Cotton, Controversie concerning Liberty
Gorton, Simplicities Defence
Hollingworth, Certain Queres
London Ministers, Jus Divinum
Mather, R., Reply to Mr. Rutherford
Noyes, Temple measured
Winslow, Hypocrisie Vnmasked
- 1647 *(Bartlet, Model)
Child, New-Englands Jonas
Cotton, Bloudy Tenent, Washed
Grovnnds and Endes of the Baptisme
Severall Questions
Ellis, Vindiciae Catholicae
Shepard, Day-Breaking
(Ward, Simple Cobler)
Winslow, New-Englands Salamander
- 1648 Allin and Shepard, Defence of the Answer⁵
Cobbet, Jvst Vindication
(Cotton, Briefe Exposition of . . . Canticles)¹
* Way of Congregational Churches Cleared
Eliot, Glorious Progress of the Gospel
Good news from New-England
Hooker, Survey of the Summe
(Massachusetts General Court, Lauues and Liberties)
Norton, Responsio
Shepard, Clear Sun-shine
- 1649 Act for the promoting and propagating the gospel
(Hooker, Covenant of Grace)
- 1650 Cotton, Of the Holinesse of Church-Members
Hudson, Vindication⁶
- 1651 Cawdrey, Inconsistencie
Whitfield, Light Appearing
- 1652 Cawdrey, Sober Answer
Clarke, Ill Newes from New-England

Cobbet, Civil Magistrates Povver
Stone, Congregational Church
Strength out of Weaknesse
Williams, Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody

- 1653 Eliot and Mayhew, Tears of Repentance
[Cambridge] Platform of Church-Discipline
Shepard, Treatise of Liturgies⁵
- 1654 Cotton, Certain Queries Tending to Accommodation
(New Covenant)
Eliot, Christian Commonwealth
Johnson, Wonder-Working Providence
Result of a Synod at Cambridge
- 1655 Baylie, Dissuasive . . . vindicated
- 1656 Cotton, Censure
- 1657 Eliot et al., Banners of Grace and Love
- 1658 Cotton, Defence of Mr. John Cotton
(Firmin, Of Schism)
(Gorges, America Painted to the Life)
Hudson, Vindication⁶ . . . with an Addition
Rutherford, Survey of the Survey
- 1659 Davenport and Hooke, Catechisme
- 1660 Massachusetts General Court, Humble Petition and Address

Davenport, Power of Congregational Churches (1672)
Norton, Copy of the Letter (1664)
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Abbreviations

- CC - "Church Catalogue"
- DAB - Dictionary of American Biography
- DAPEL - Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature
- DNB - Dictionary of National Biography
- HMD - Henry Martyn Dexter, Congregationalism